This WOMAN BUSINESS

A Play By

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BENN W. LEVY

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THIS WOMAN BUSINESS

By Benn W. Levy

THIS brilliant English comedy based on the perennially interesting subject of misogyny, has been heartily acclaimed by enthusiastic audiences in London, Boston, and New York. Published in book form, its clever lines and subtlety of plot will be even more apparent. Witty dialogue and lively interplay of well-diversified characters give 'This Woman Business' a strength and body rare in modern comedy.

The plot concerns five men who are banded together by their hatred of women. Into this Eveless Eden comes Joan Crawford, a young woman who confesses that she is a thief, and tells them to send for the police.

From this situation, the author, a young Englishman, has made not only an amusing comedy but a delicate satire on the institution of marriage and the relation of the sexes.

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THIS WOMAN BUSINESS

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A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

By BEN W. LEVY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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To, for and from
MY MOTHER

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HODGES

HONEY

NETTLEBANK

CROFTS

BROWN

BINGHAM

TRENT

CRAWFORD

ADDLESHAW

ACT I

The room has the appearance slightly of a club smoking-room, for it is upholstered in leather and there are round the walls three writing-desks. Large French windows look out on to a—spasmodically—moonlit night. It is the month of May.

Recently used port glasses and coffee-cups stand on odd corners; a pretty and pert maid is collecting the cups. A young man, with unbounded self-assurance and impudence, lounges by the fireplace, his glance following her hostilely as she moves about the room. His dinner jacket is velvet, his shirt unstarched, his tie a trifle large.

Three men, in dinner dress, stroll past the window on the terrace outside. The hither one, a man in the late thirties, asks—

HODGES: Coming out, Honey?

HONEY: In a minute. I'm having another cup of coffee.

[*They pass on, smoking placidly.* THE MAID, *fully conscious of a second motive, tosses her head.*

HONEY (*after some moments' further scrutiny, speaking with insolent, almost mincing precision*): What is your name?

THE MAID: Nettlebank.

[*She returns his insolence by an exaggerated show of independence.*

HONEY (*distastefully*): Nettlebank. (*He sips his coffee.*) Is that all?

THE MAID: Ada. (*He winces.*) You don't seem to like it.

HONEY: I detest it. Will you kindly step over here—Nettlebank. (*She comes.*) Nettlebank, that is not your hair.

THE MAID: Oh, isn't it? Well, it is.

HONEY (*sternly*): I say it is not your hair. You are a thief: (*softly*) it belongs to Helen of Troy.

THE MAID: It belongs to no one of the kind. I——

HONEY: Silence! That neck, too: that neck you thieved from Cleopatra; and filched that brow from Dido, oh my—Nettlebank.

(*He takes her, willing, save for the mere formalities of resistance, in his arms and, with a comical show of distaste, kisses her.*) Strongly against my will, Nettlebank, I find myself constrained to kiss you.

THE MAID: So it seems! (*He does so again.*)

HONEY: Mind you, I don't like it.

THE MAID: Oh, of course not!

HONEY: But then it is not you, oh Ada Nettlebank, that I am kissing.

THE MAID: Oh, no!

HONEY (*rhetorically*): It is Cleopatra, Helen, Dido. (*He kisses her again.*) I know a bank where the nettles grow. (*Still holding her in his arms, he catches sight of* BINGHAM, *a very handsome, very immaculate and very old man, who has come in from a door on the right and is serenely watching them while he relights his cigar.* NETTLEBANK *has her back turned to him, and* HONEY, *unabashed, repeats absently:*) I know a bank where the nettles grow. (*Another prolonged kiss. When it is over and the old man, with no other expression on his face than one of mild interest, has passed out through the window, he dusts his mouth and coat-lapels fastidiously and finishes his coffee with frigid dignity.*) You may go, Nettlebank. Kindly remove my cup.

NETTLEBANK: I suppose you think you're funny.

HONEY (*taking his time*): I know I'm funny. I'm incredibly funny. I'm quite definitely the funniest person I know. Now take my cup away.

NETTLEBANK (*as she goes out with the tray*): Well, you have got a nerve!

[*Very soon* HODGES *and* CROFTS, *followed by* BINGHAM *and* BROWN, *stroll in at the window.* BROWN *is a little fat man of perhaps forty-eight, bald, with steel-rimmed eye-glasses and a drooping moustache. People who take a particular interest in such things might even entertain doubts as to the "genuineness" of his black tie. His starched collar also is of the kind*

more usual in the day-time. CROFTS *is probably six years older, bushy of eyebrow, military of moustache and carriage.*

HODGES: There's going to be a storm. (*For some moments they all wander about preparatory to disposing of themselves comfortably, lighting their pipes and so on.*) Another glass of port, Brown?

CROFTS: Yes, there'll be a bit of rain. Do you get much here?

BROWN: We had a lot last week at Surbiton.

HODGES: Middling, you know.

HONEY: Hodges, be good enough not to talk about the weather. (*Everybody's attention is concentrated.*) I have something of the utmost gravity to say to you.

HODGES: Have you indeed!

BROWN: Private?

HONEY: Essentially private.

BROWN: Perhaps you'd like us to go?

BINGHAM: Oh, really, I couldn't dream of going.

HONEY: No, no one need go. I have no doubt it concerns you all.

HODGES: Well, out with it.

HONEY: You have, I believe, a domestic called Nettlebank.

HODGES: I have.

HONEY: I'm sorry, Hodges, I'm very sorry; but she must go.

HODGES: Well, it's very nice of you to give me warning.

HONEY: I've no desire to be dictatorial, but there is no alternative. At least, either she goes or I go. One house is not big enough to hold us both.

BROWN: Good God, you don't mean——

HONEY: Certainly not. I'll tell you what I mean. You asked me down here, Hodges, for a bachelor holiday. What were your words? You said to me, "Honey," you said, "I have purchased a cottage in the wilds of Cornwall, and I have converted it into a

manor and an ideal home. It shall be consecrate to male society. No woman shall so much as glimpse its interior. Come with me," you said, "stay a month, three months, six months. There you will find men, men's men, woman-haters like yourself," you said, "and there you will find the river of life flowing clear and smooth like a summer brook." You didn't put it as prettily as that, but that was what you meant. And what happens? What is the realization of this lyric dream? I come. I come, and within two hours of my arrival I find I have been kissed.

HODGES (*jumping up*): No!

HONEY: I tell you I have.

BROWN: I don't understand. By whom?

HONEY: Nettlebank.

CROFTS: Nonsense.

HONEY: It's perfectly true, I tell you. Ask the Judge. He was present.

BINGHAM: Oh, it's quite true.

BROWN: He was present! But that—that's most irregular!

CROFTS: And if it is true, you've no right to tell us.

HONEY: Why not? Wouldn't you?

CROFTS: Certainly not.

HONEY: Are we to infer then that the same misfortune has occurred to you?

CROFTS: You are to infer nothing. A gentleman doesn't repeat the names of women he has flirted with.

HONEY: That would probably take a real gentleman too long. The only gentleman I know repeats the names of women he hasn't flirted with: but I admit he's temperamentally lazy.

CROFTS: It's my belief there *are* no gentlemen nor ladies in this generation.

HONEY: I quite agree: though, of course, there never *were* any ladies. Scratch 'em and see. My father, who was a dressmaker, spent his life scratching 'em, and he knew. But you're leading me

from the point. Hodges, it's for you to speak. I repeat "I have been kissed." What are you going to do about it?

HODGES: You're an ass.

HONEY: I know I am, but that's entirely irrelevant. I am also extremely indignant: I am infuriated, I am mortified, and no one has any sympathy.

BROWN: But you needn't have done it if you didn't want to?

HONEY: Want to! Want to! Do you suppose I wanted to? Does a silkworm *want* to be converted into a piece of ribbon? Does an ostrich *want* to degenerate into a feather-boa? Or a man into a poet? No. But they have to: woman is their master. I hate kissing—at least I hate the humiliating aftermath. It gives me a feeling of inferiority—to which, alas, I am rapidly becoming accustomed. I prize my chastity very dearly—not as a virtue but as a matter of good taste. If you like, I am fastidious. No man can look at his best, feel at his best, or be at his best with his arms and lips inextricably and uncomfortably entwined with those of a member of the alternative sex. What more horrific a spectacle, for instance, is there than the modern ballroom? Dancing! I say that dancing is ruining the young women of to-day. That is to say, it makes them more women than ever.

BINGHAM: I'll tell you what's ruining the young women of to-day, young man. You are.

HONEY: Oh, a very small proportion, Judge: I'm such a busy man. Anyway, I could never repay them for the ruin they've wrought on me. What have they done to *me ?* What have they made of *me ?* A poet! God, how I despise poets!

BROWN *(innocently)*: So do I, but why blame the women?

HONEY: I don't. I blame the system. They ought to be segregated. Penned in. Cut off from us altogether. Wasn't it Mr. Granville Barker who said that Turkey's the only sane country in Europe and that's in Asia? No, it wasn't. But it's true. How can a man live a clean, vigorous, creative life when he has women for breakfast, women for luncheon, women for dinner and women

for tea? It's the unhealthiest diet ever devised. The day is not far distant when a new kind of Prohibition will rear its head, and I shall bear its flag. Sometimes I dream of sitting for Parliament. I have drafted a dozen anti-feminist bills already. I shall put a heavy duty on women. I shall fine the parents of female children. I shall forbid young men to be introduced to them unless they can prove in a court of law that they are too stupid or too degenerate to deserve a better fate. Why should I—I with all my vast potentialities for good—be condemned to frittering away my time and energy in playing upon flappers' vanity and having my own tickled in return? Why, Mr. Brown? Why should I? Answer me.

BROWN: I—I—I will not answer you.

HONEY: You ought to answer me. You all ought to answer. You come down here masquerading as women-haters and you don't so much as complain when you've been kissed! I'm the only one with any fight in me, I——

BROWN (*indignant*): We've *not* been kissed!

HONEY: Speak for yourself. Let us improve the occasion with a little candour. Hodges, Crofts, Judge! Listen to me——

HODGES: Oh, stop talking. I have in my pocket a letter. It is from Addleshaw, my partner.

BROWN: I know Addleshaw. What does he want?

HODGES: He wants to come down here next month.

HONEY: Well, there's plenty of room, isn't there? Is he a woman-hater?

HODGES: Very much the reverse. That's the point.

HONEY: Then surely he won't find it very amusing down here —now that Nettlebank is going. I suppose she is going, Hodges?

HODGES (*smiling, nods*): She's going to-morrow. All the rest of the staff is male. You needn't have concerned yourself. As a matter of fact, she was given notice last week.

HONEY: Was she? Why?

HODGES: Because——(*provocatively*) Never mind.

HONEY: Have you been——

HODGES: No, you fool, I have not. Well, what about Addleshaw? Shall we let him come? You don't think he'll strike a discordant note?

CROFTS: Our young friend Honey has struck that already.

HONEY: I have struck nothing. I have *been* struck. Let him come, Hodges; we'll convert him.

HODGES: Is that the general feeling? (*They assent.*) Very well. Of course, he's firmly convinced that we shan't be here by then. He regards it as physically impossible for five men to live amicably together in one house without sight of a woman for six weeks, let alone six months. (*They laugh.*) We shall see. Of course, as I warned you, we can't expect much excitement.

BINGHAM (*parenthetically*): Now that Nettlebank's going.

HODGES: Quite. And the nearest village ten miles away. But there's the country and the garden and the golf links within motorable distance. And we're all men with resources of our own. Crofts is writing up his travels and explorations. Honey has his poetry. I'm amusing myself, as some of you know, with a kind of mock-serious essay on woman. The Judge is a voracious reader. And—and—(*his eye falls dubiously on* BROWN) and so on. Anyway, we shall see.

HONEY: Besides, we are a club, a society with a common interest—The Worshipful Association of Confirmed Misogynists. We ought to lecture to each other, and read each other papers, and elect each other, and reject each other, and the Lord knows what not. There's not enough form about this society. I propose Mr. Hodges as President.

BROWN and CROFTS: Hear, hear!

HONEY: Carried *nemine contra.* Now come along, Mr. President: let's have a symposium here and now. I want to know why all you fellows call yourselves woman-haters. At present I only know why I am. I propose that Mr. Chairman opens the discussion.

BROWN: I beg to second that.

THE OTHERS: Hear, hear.

HODGES (*rising amid cheerful acclamation inspired by* HONEY'S *vitality*): Well, as a preliminary, just circulate that port.

HONEY: Hooray! Port forward!

HODGES: Well, gentlemen, why am I a woman-hater? Briefly, because I believe she's an inferior animal in every way—mentally, physically, psychologically. This sounds reactionary, I know. . . .

BROWN: Not at all.

HODGES: Yes, I admit that. I have not time now to substantiate it, however, though in my essay there will be a more or less exhaustive collection of proofs and illustrations. Let it suffice now to remind you, gentlemen, of the hackneyed fact that all history can scarcely show you an example of the female creative genius.

BINGHAM (*muttering*): Every female is a creative genius.

HODGES (*quickly*): You refer to the creation of children, Judge. That's a quibble, you'll admit?

BINGHAM (*with charming grace*): Certainly, sir.

HONEY: I should think so! Damn it, you might as well call a sausage-machine a creative genius!

HODGES: A very delicate analogy. Female geniuses? Who are they? One might almost count them on one's fingers! Literature produces Jane Austen and—and, oh, George Eliot and Georges Sand, if you like. And Music Chaminade, and Painting Vigée Lebrun—both of them second-rate. . . .

BROWN: Chaminade second-rate? Oh, I say!

HODGES (*turning on him*): Well, name me half a dozen female Wagners, Miltons or Velasquez! Half a dozen that approach them even!

BROWN: I shall do nothing of the sort. You're making this speech, not me!

HODGES: Nor will anyone who values his reputation as a critic! Many a woman's name is written large in history certainly; but either because they have had greatness thrust upon them or happened to possess a capacity for rousing men's lowest instincts.

BROWN: Oh, I say! Think of Beatrice.

HODGES: I *was* thinking of Beatrice: also of Lucretia Borgia and Helen of Troy and Ninon de l'Enclos and Messalina!

BROWN: Well, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria?

HODGES: Do you suppose we'd ever have known their names if they had been drapers' daughters?

BROWN: Well, Joan of Arc?

HODGES (*with a bad grace*): I give you Joan of Arc. Come, gentlemen: seriously, the thing's indisputable. Nor will the usual defence hold water. You know the feminist argument—that if women have a poor record it is because they have had a poor education, often no education: little has been expected of them, so little has been achieved by them. It is a defence, gentlemen, that ignores the fundamental differences between the sexes. In my opinion, the female is so constituted that centuries of education and encouragement would effect a difference only skin-deep.

CROFTS (*warmly*): Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

HODGES: You may produce a woman who *seems* more capable of grasping wider issues, who *seems* more rational, less petty, who *seems*, in short, more like a man . . . (BROWN *preens himself*) but for all that I believe, myself, that at bottom, deep down beneath the surface, you will not have touched the Eternal Feminine, the woman as we know her now, a servant of every kind of pettiness; mentally mean and sordid; exploiter of virtues and instincts and everything sacred; and yet their slave; impervious in the mass to ideals; unable to appreciate where the personal element is lacking; a confused thinker, at once cynical and sentimental; obsessed, eternally obsessed with the one great fixed idea of sex, Sex, SEX, *SEX;* a creature without horizon, without breadth of vision, living a life of tactics rather than strategy; gauging success by mean and petty little wayside triumphs; a thing fawning, snarling, simpering, scratching, biting—in short, gentlemen, in short (if you will forgive the word)—a Cat!

BROWN: Oh, I say!

HODGES: Possibly this may seem too strong.

HONEY: Not a bit!

HODGES: I am sorry. After all, it is only a faith that may not be proved one way or the other; at least, in our lifetimes: and though my personal belief is that woman is foredoomed to this life I have tried to sketch, to remain as now merely a machine for the reproduction of the race, that is no reason why we should not give her every chance of becoming something better. So educate her and emancipate her to your heart's desire, and let us pray God the miracle will happen! I thank you, gentlemen. (*He sits down amid applause.*) Will you take up the line now, Judge?

[*Amid renewed applause* SIR ARTHUR BINGHAM *rises, very much at his ease, very dignified, very impressive. His voice, though still rich and pleasant, is, like his gait, a trifle unsteady. He speaks with the slow, self-confident deliberation of a long experience.*

BINGHAM: Mr. President; Gentlemen. I am honoured by the precedence you give my all too poor contribution on this, if I may say so, all too fascinating subject. But I am so old, and indeed have been so old for so many years now, that I am accustomed to precedence, and I expect it. My young friend Honey, perhaps, is one of those who believe that youth has all the advantages. I, who have known both, am prepared to disillusion him. Age has all the privilege, all the consideration, all the rights, all the luxurious comfort that results from its freedom from the bondage of passions and, I might add, ideals. And I for one take full advantage of its advantages. I accept the consideration, exercise the privileges, enforce the rights, indulge the comfort to the uttermost, and such is age that, however much I exploit it, my popularity increases every year. As a young man, if you will believe me, sir, I was not even handsome, but white hair has remedied that. My conversation used to be objected to as sarcastic and smug; now it is applauded as whimsical and old-fashioned. In the words of various young ladies who have met me, I may, I think, not unfairly describe myself as an "old darling." It is a reputation that I achieved in

the early years of my dotage and have traded upon ever since. I tell you all this, gentlemen, partly that you may know how I am accustomed to be treated and partly that you may indulge me straightway when, on the subject before us to-night, I fall short of your expectations. For, as you may know, I have served as a judge in the Divorce Courts for over fifteen years and practised in the same branch for nearly twice as long. My experience, my intimate experience of women, therefore, is no small one, bachelor though I am. What then, you ask, is the fruit of that experience? Gentlemen, after my first case I knew all there was to know about Woman. I was good enough even to pass the knowledge on to my friends. When I resigned from the Bench, an old man, I knew nothing about Woman, and am good enough now to pass my ignorance on to you. That, sir, is the fruit of over half a century's experience, and I humbly apologise for it. By what right then do I find myself among a company of misogynists? Partly, I confess, because my ignorance—and therefore the subject of it—angers me, and partly in the hope that you may remedy it. Woman at present is an unknown quantity to me, and, like a savage, I dislike the unknown. Man I know: know him well—what he will do and what he will say under almost any given circumstances. At my time of life Man is an open book to me and Woman a sealed one. Among men I feel a god: among women I feel—a man! And that wounds my vanity. Gentlemen, I have finished. It remains only to thank our host most heartily in anticipation of his generous hospitality, which on my own behalf and on behalf, I may say, of all of us; I do, sir, believe me, with all my heart.

[*Renewed applause and chattering while he resumes his seat.*

BROWN: As pithy as ever, Sir Arthur, as pithy as ever! Your hand's not lost its cunning through lying idle, I see.

BINGHAM: You are too good, sir. I had always thought that anyone who relied on press reports of my judicial humour must have conceived me as fresh from an asylum. It was my constant hope that my sallies sounded better in court than they read in the newspapers.

BROWN: They did, Sir Arthur, I assure you. You wouldn't remember, of course, but I once had the privilege of serving on a jury under you; and I remember well how intensely amused everyone in court was.

BINGHAM: Except, probably, the defendant.

BROWN: Ah, well, she was a bad lot, and if you choose the primrose path, you know, you can't expect—er—expect . . .

HONEY: Life to be a bed of roses.

BROWN: Exactly. Not that I wasn't sorry for the girl. I mean, she was extremely pretty and—and—what was her name, Judge?

BINGHAM (*amused but kindly*): For the moment it escapes me.

BROWN: Ah, nonsense. You remember—a small fair girl with blue eyes, a little touched up *I* thought—dressed in black?

BINGHAM: There were several such.

BROWN: Jove, I remember it all distinctly. Most interesting case. Quite fascinated *me*. Very unsavoury too. I remember thinking how dull the Stock Exchange was compared with the Bar. To be quite frank, I was rather sorry for the girl. I remember feeling extremely thankful that she was convicted. It would have been awful for an *innocent* person to have suffered the painful ordeal of that terrible trial.

HONEY: We have progressed from trial by ordeal to ordeal by trial, and still you are not satisfied. A dangerous revolutionary among us, Mr. Chairman.

BROWN (*slightly nettled*): I'm nothing of the sort. You're twisting my words. Call me inhuman if you like, but revolutionary I will not stand! I merely ventured to express a little natural sympathy.

CROFTS: Sympathy be blowed! A wretched little chit of a woman with no control over her passions drags her husband's name through the mud. . . .

HONEY: He means the court, Judge.

CROFTS: I do not, young man. I mean the mud. She makes a public fool of him, forces him to wash his dirty linen in public,

perhaps breaks his foolish heart, and probably enjoys the press notoriety thoroughly herself, and then she wants sympathy! Sympathy forsooth! I used to know a tribe in East Africa called the Ronga who managed these things with more sense.

HONEY: And I know of one in North America who do.

CROFTS (*interested*): What are they called?

HONEY: Er—the Americans.

[BROWN *gives a roar of laughter.*

CROFTS (*bitingly*): Well, you have amused Mr. Brown.

[BROWN *checks himself in confusion.*

BROWN: Not at all. You were telling us about the Wonga.

CROFTS: The Ronga.

BROWN: I mean the Ronga. Pray continue.

CROFTS: You must excuse me. It would bore you. Let us hear about Mr. Honey's tribe.

HONEY: My tribe? The Americans? You must excuse me also. I think it was Samuel Butler who said that, like ours, half the customs of this tribe are unbelievable and the other half unmentionable. It would *not* bore you. But the Ronga interest me. What is their divorce system?

CROFTS: A man who has reason to be dissatisfied with his wife flogs her and sends her home to her unlucky parents, and demands back the money he gave them on his wedding-day.

HONEY: Among my tribe the custom is for the parents to give the bridegroom money.

HODGES: And what is the woman's position once she is married to a Ronga?

HONEY: Wouldn't the singular be Rongum?

HODGES: Silence, Honey. Crofts?

CROFTS: Her position is the only reasonable one. She fulfils the functions of child-bearer and domestic servant. She does all the household work and what little nursing there is to be done, most of the industrial work and most of the agricultural work.

HONEY: And in her spare time?

CROFTS: They are wise enough not to give her any. I only wish our women had none!

HODGES: And the men: what do they do?

CROFTS: They do the inventive and creative work: architecture and so on. All routine work they leave to the women. They play games a lot, and pay visits and talk and think and hunt and fight. . . .

HONEY: Creative work!

CROFTS: Yes, sir, creative. They *invent* weapons and traps and strategy: and finally, of course, they govern.

HONEY: Of course. The weapons and traps and strategy naturally lead to that.

CROFTS: I entirely agree with you.

HODGES: Never mind that. The point seems to me to be that they realise the difference between the sexes; man imaginative, woman administrative. And man the autocrat and master in consequence. Not a very enlightened one perhaps, but that's beside the point.

CROFTS: But to my mind quite enlightened enough.

BROWN (*rising excitedly*): One moment, please. (*With emphasis.*) You have expressed my sentiments exactly, Mr. President; *exactly*. Allow me to say a few words at this juncture.

THE OTHERS: Hear, hear! Speech, speech!

CROFTS: Excuse my just saying one thing before you begin. Hodges, you misunderstand the thing. When you say the Ronga are unenlightened autocrats, you are mistaken. They refuse equality of opportunity to their women, not because the idea has never occurred to them, but because they don't believe in it. They know it's bad economy to waste a man's education on a woman: and they are right. There is no more monstrous abortion than a woman educated at Girton, and the man who sends his daughter there is either a practical joker or an imbecile. (*To* BROWN, *who is still on his feet.*) Thank you, sir. I just wanted to say that.

BROWN (*icily*): Mr. Chairman, sir. My daughter is at Girton. She is not an abortion. I am not a practical joker: though conceivably an imbecile.

CROFTS (*also rising; in consternation*): My dear, sir, you should have told me. How could I guess? I cant apologise enough. A most unfortunate position, most unfortunate.

BROWN: Unfortunate! Unfortunate! What do you expect? If I went about the country calling every wretched girl who tries to get a little knowledge and information into her head an abortion and their fathers imbeciles for allowing it, I should only expect to insult someone sooner or later. And what's more, I should only expect to show my ignorance. You're so wrapped up in your Bonga or—or whatever the fools call themselves . . .

CROFTS (*restraining himself ominously*): The Ronga, sir!

BROWN: The Ronga, then . . . that—that you don't even know how little a father has to do with it. Do you suppose I *wanted* the expense of keeping Dorothy at Girton?

CROFTS (*hotly*): I supposed you had enough control over your womenfolk to *do* what you wanted.

BROWN: Well, you supposed wrong. I happen to have seven daughters and a wife. You come here and talk about women, and you know as much about them as—as a debauched camel!

CROFTS (*furious, shouting down at the unflinching* BROWN, *nose to nose*): Repeat that, sir, if you dare!

BROWN: I said "debauched camel," sir, and I meant "debauched camel."

CROFTS: Then I withdraw my apology. I said "imbecile," but I meant "unmitigated buffoon."

BROWN: And when I said "debauched camel" I meant . . .

HODGES (*who has been trying to intercede all the time*): Gentlemen, gentlemen! Restrain yourselves. Is this worth while? Brown, I must ask you to accept Crofts' apology. He made an unfortunate blunder, but anyone might have done it.

BROWN: Anyone might not have done it.

CROFTS: I have said that the apology is withdrawn. If I'd known the type of man I was dealing with, it should never have been made.

BROWN: There! You hear? And that's the kind of person I'm asked to meet!

CROFTS: Confound you, sir, if it weren't . . .

BROWN: And confound you!

HODGES (*sternly*): Gentlemen, I must insist. Out of courtesy to me.

[*A sheepish silence.*

BROWN (*cunningly, loftily*): Out of courtesy to my host I accept the apology.

[CROFTS *explodes in a series of indignant noises.*

HODGES (*seizing the opportunity*): Thank you. I think I'll ask Honey to carry on.

ALL (*except* CROFTS): Hear, hear! Honey.

HONEY (*rising, mellifluously*): I think it was Samson who said, "Out of the strong came forth sweetness": and they said unto him, "What is sweeter than honey?" and throughout the ages down to this very night Echo answers "What?" Honey is a subject, gentlemen, I have always found interesting, and it is only an inherent modesty that bids me turn from it to the distasteful subject of Woman. I think it was Roger Bacon who said that Woman is as Woman does: in other words, that, contrary to the tradition of her, she is coarse; she is unrefined, in thought, in action, in appearance. I think it was Schopenhauer who said, "Only a man whose judgment is clouded by his sexual instinct could give that short-legged, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, stunted race the name of the fair sex." And that, gentlemen, is my complaint. Woman is in every way the enemy of Art. Not only is she incapable of creating it, at least on a first-rate scale, but her mental outlook, her very constitution, physical and spiritual, is radically opposed to it. Art is imaginative, she is practical; Art is real, she is romantic; Art is fundamental, she is superficial; Art is far-seeing,

she cannot see beyond her powdered nose. We paint women, yes; we write our poems and sing our songs about women, yes; but they are not real women; we dare not; they are ideal women. I think it was the Bishop of London who said, "I don't mind clinging women, provided they don't cling to me." And so it is with the true artist. We don't mind real women, provided they are not real to us. Their very presence is a distraction. No woman ever inspired a work of art unless the artist completely misunderstood her. And that is a faculty that I unfortunately do not possess. And so it is that I look forward to this next six months, free from feminine distraction, in the confident anticipation that with such advantages I shall light such a light in Art as by the grace of God shall never be put out; and Hodges' life will not, after all, have been in vain!

[*He sits down amidst a polite acclamation, which* Brown *interrupts suddenly.*

Brown: Hodges!

[*He is staring at the French windows.*

Hodges (*following his gaze*): What's the matter?

Brown (*with awe*): I think I saw a face at the window!

[Crofts *snorts.* Hodges *goes through on to the verandah and peers into the darkness on both sides. He returns, leaving the windows ajar.*

Hodges (*going to the bell and pressing it*): I see nothing. Are you sure?

Brown: I could have sworn.

Crofts (*contemptuously*): I doubt it!

Bingham: A gardener, I imagine, or some junior member of the staff, attracted by curiosity and our young friend's epigrams.

Honey: Probably; but why "junior," Judge?

[Trent, *the butler, comes in in answer to the summons.*

Hodges: You might see if there's anyone prowling about the garden. We thought we heard someone at the window.

TRENT: Yes, sir.

[*He goes.*

HODGES: Another cigar, Crofts?

CROFTS: No, a pipe, thank you.

[*He lights one.*

HODGES: Come now, Brown. Let's hear your views.

BROWN (*rises. He is the conventional but efficient after-dinner speaker, though ruffled to-night. Much pompous play with his spectacles*): Mr. Chairman; gentlemen. I am, alas! no speaker, and (*fixing his eye on* HONEY), for the matter of that, I am no scholar, but I think it was William Shakespeare who said, "All the world's a stage. . . ." (*The others, except* CROFTS, *applaud this hit.*) However. To continue. "And all the men and women simply players. They have their exits and their entrances. One man in his time plays many parts," but as for myself, among many and various parts, that of—er—philosopher has never fallen to my lot. It is therefore with feelings of the greatest natural diffidence that I find myself, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, so unexpectedly called upon to speak to-night. Which puts me in mind of an old chestnut that perhaps some of you may not have heard. An Irishwoman was standing on her doorstep one day when a friend of her husband's came running up in the greatest excitement. "Och, Mrs. O'Flannagan," says Pat, "sure Oi've such bad news for ye. Sure, ye know the new watch ye gave your husband?" "Sure, an' Oi do, Pat; whatever is it?" cries Mrs. O'Flannagan. "Sure, an' it's been crushed to smithereens by a steam-roller," says Pat. "Sure, an' is that all?" says she with great relief. "Sure, an' it is not," says Pat, "for bedad it was in the poor divil's pocket at the time, at all, at all!" (*This is graciously accepted.*) However. That is perhaps not altogether to the point. Some explanation is expected of why I am here at all: and I will be perfectly frank with you. Gentlemen, I am here, in a word, because I am tired of women.

HONEY: Shame!

BROWN (*warmly*): I contemptuously repudiate your flippant innuendo. I am tired of women in general and of some women in

particular. To make myself clear, I am compelled, reluctantly compelled, to lift a corner of that veil which hides the drama of my private life. Gentlemen, I shall not shrink. My wife and myself have been victimised by a difference of opinion in which each one of my seven girls, not excepting our youngest-born, Olivia, has seen fit to give me wrong. Alas! I have no sons. But, if you will believe me, the whole, what shall I say?—the whole dissension, the entire domestic upheaval, is due, if we trace it back far enough, to no bigger object, to no more important an article, to no more significant—er—er—(*at a loss for a word*) a thing than a coffee-bean. Not a box of beans, mark you, not a bag of beans, not even two beans, but one! One single, solitary, isolated, malevolent coffee-bean. I will not worry you, gentlemen, with the history of how this came about. I merely mention it to show how from the meanest causes great things spring. However. Let me be brief, gentlemen. This last week has been one of the most miserable of my life. Our house has been a temple of gloom. Nothing has gone right. The servants have been breaking my crockery and catching diseases. My girls have been quarrelling and crying amongst themselves, and, if I have any penetration at all, some of them falling in love with the wrong men. And worst of all, although I have decided that I cannot with decency be on speaking terms with anyone, my wife has been going about her duties smiling and placid and refusing apparently even to admit that—that a coffee-bean had ever come between us! When, added to that, my doctor recommended me a complete change, can you wonder, gentlemen, that I accepted the cordial, the hospitable invitation of my friend and client, the Chairman. In conclusion, I can only look forward to an ideal holiday which shall leave me freshened and steadied to return and with a lighter heart to shoulder once again the—er—the white man's burden of domestic life.

[*He sits amid applause.*

HODGES: Excellent. Now, Crofts, your turn.

CROFTS (*still disgruntled*): No, no, you can do without my contribution. (*General protestation.*) I'm no tub-thumper. And no

theorist either. You must excuse me. (*But they will not.*) Very well, you must let me off with a toast. (*He rises.*) Fill your glasses, gentlemen. (*He lifts his own and waits for them.*) I give you a negative kind of toast, I'm afraid. Let us drink to the immediate future, Eden without Eve. Gentlemen, "Never a woman!"

ALL (*clinking glasses, repeat*): "Never a woman!" "Never a woman!"

[*A noise is heard on the verandah. Two struggling figures stumble through the French windows and continue to struggle while the others look on agape, glasses half raised to drink. Then one of the intruders manages to trip up the other, who becomes recognisable as a dishevelled Trent. His assailant is a woman in the twenties. She stands panting, dazed and very white, looking from one to the other. Her class is not apparent, for her clothes, though ruffled, are tailor-made and dark. The silence is broken by* BROWN, *half in a whisper.*

BROWN (*very slowly*): It's a woman!

HONEY (*pulling himself together*): The Lord has answered our prayer—in *His* fashion.

HODGES: Trent, get up.

[*He does so, collecting bravely his last shreds of dignity.*

CROFTS (*feeling something should be said*): Well, young woman? What have you got to say for yourself?

[*The Judge ambles off to an easy chair, preparing to enjoy himself thoroughly. The girl hesitates, then turns to leave through the window.*

HODGES (*intercepting her*): Please don't go yet.

[*She tries to get round him, but fails.*

THE GIRL (*frightened, but in a low voice*): Let me go.

[*For answer he closes the window and stands in front of it. She looks about her in a dazed way and sways a little.*

HODGES: Where did you find her, Trent?

TRENT: I saw a dark figure peering in at the dining-room window, sir. It heard me, and tried to run, but I caught it up

outside here, sir, not knowing in the dark it was (so to speak) this sex, sir.

HODGES (*to the girl*): Well?

[*She doesn't answer, looking round from face to face. Then she makes another vain attempt to go.*

THE GIRL (*scarcely audible*): Let me go.

HODGES: You owe me an explanation first. You trespass on my grounds and throw my servants about the floor, and then prepare to leave us.

THE GIRL (*vacantly*): Let me go.

HONEY: Come, Hodges. The girl's not well. Let her be for a moment. Here, sit you down, Phœbe, till you feel like telling us what's the trouble.

[*She turns her gaze on him, but makes no other motion.*

CROFTS: The trouble! Good heavens, this generation beats me. Do you think it's clever to treat a common-or-garden burglar like that?

HONEY: Garden burglar, possibly. Common, certainly not. Have you ever seen a burglar like this?

CROFTS: I've never seen a burglar at all. I only know that . . .

BINGHAM: Tut, tut, tut. Young woman, pull yourself together and tell us what you're here for.

THE GIRL (*recovering her wits by an effort*): I—I came to see my nurse. She used to live here. Mrs. Perry.

CROFTS: Oh, did she! Well, it may interest you to know that this place has only just been built.

HONEY (*encouragingly*): You mean your nurse used to live in an old cottage here? (*She nods.*) Well, this is it. This gentleman, who happens to be oozing with money, has rebuilt it and made these grounds.

HODGES: I'm afraid I owe you an apology. Mrs. Perry died last year and I secured this ground.

CROFTS: Well, is that any reason why she should peer round the windows instead of ringing at the door?

HODGES (*moving from the window to let her pass*): I'm sorry to have detained you.

HONEY: I'm sorry we have insulted you. (*She moves slowly out into the night. They all watch her.*) I say, we can't let her go like that. She's ill, and there's not another house for eight miles.

CROFTS (*growling*): That's not our business.

[HODGES *moves about thoughtfully.* HONEY, *frowning, fills a pipe, while* BROWN *is still left, stupefied, glass raised, in the posture in which the intrusion found him.* TRENT *leaves the room haughtily. But presently the* GIRL'S *figure appears in the window again. They all look at her.*

HONEY (*sociably*): Hallo!

[*She takes a slow step into the room.*

THE GIRL (*at length*): I—I'm a thief.

[*Everyone receives this thunderbolt characteristically, and* BROWN, *overcome, sinks limply into the chair behind him.*

HONEY (*refusing as a point of honour to be shocked*): Are you? So is Hodges. Only he calls it being a millionaire. Have something to drink.

[*He pours some out in his glass. She refuses, but he insists. It pulls her together at once, and with restored composure she seats herself in the nearest chair.*

THE GIRL (*with impersonal interest, wearily defiant*): Well? What are you going to do about it?

[*The silence is broken by* BROWN.

BROWN (*exploding*): I—I'm going mad!

THE GIRL: You'll have me to keep you company.

BROWN (*indignantly*): How dare you address yourself to me?

HONEY: Without an introduction.

THE GIRL (*getting to her feet, and speaking with hysterical emphasis*): Dare! Dare? Because when you've lost everything you

can dare a lot. (*She is delving in her bosom, and eventually brings forth a wad of notes, which she tosses on the table.*) I *dared* steal those, and now I'm going to prison for it. A little poverty will make you dare a great deal.

CROFTS: Come now, you needn't worry to spin the tale to us.

THE GIRL (*turning on him*): I'm not going to spin the tale to you. I don't want your pity. I took the money because—well—I took the money. And—and—— (*She pauses.*) Well, what are you all waiting for? Don't you know the police number? Here, where's your directory?

[*She looks up the number.*

BROWN: Insolence!

HODGES (*very worried*): You're being theatrical, my girl, and making yourself hysterical. Go and sit down and don't be stupid. I am perfectly capable of communicating with the police myself, if I want to.

BROWN: If you want to! And pray, do you *not* want to?

CROFTS (*disgusted*): Oh, Hodges wants to be clever now. This generation turns me sick.

BROWN: Am I to believe you don't intend to place the matter with the police?

HODGES: I don't know that I'm very lost in admiration for our punitive system.

BROWN: That's right: now abuse the police! You don't intend to fetch them then?

HODGES: I have not said so.

HONEY (*to* BROWN *and* CROFTS, *breaking in*): Your generation beats me! Here you are confronted with a woman, young and pretty, who breaks into a private house, brutally manhandles the butler and gratuitously announces that she's a thief, and your interest isn't sufficiently aroused for you to want to know what it all means, if she *is* a thief and *why* she is a thief. All you can think of is to put her into the hands of a bundle of ninnies who haven't sense enough to enjoy their unique psychological opportunities.

CROFTS: When a woman tells me she's a thief, I've sufficient common courtesy, I hope, to believe her, and sufficient stupidity left, I hope, to know what ought to be done with her as such.

HONEY: Hodges, will you let me take the floor for a little?

[HODGES, *crossing over to the fireplace, assents with a gesture.*

Very well. (*To the* GIRL) A little more port? (*He fills her glass again.*) If I may say so, you've been a little inconsiderate.

BROWN: Inconsiderate!

HONEY: You've seen the confusion you're responsible for. The situation appears to have nonplussed the company.

CROFTS: I emphatically deny that I am nonplussed. If you'd only treat a plain issue plainly there'd be no confusion at all.

HONEY: I think it was Henry of Navarre who said a speech interrupted is like an apple into which a maggot has entered. However, as I was saying, since you are responsible for our quandary, and since our suggested solutions are a trifle crude . . . (*gently overbearing another interruption*) well, inartistic, I would suggest that you would confer a great favour on us by making a suggestion yourself.

BROWN (*bouncing up*): I never heard . . .! I—I—will not stand this any longer! It's positively immoral! Sir Arthur! Have you nothing to say? What would have happened if you had asked your culprits to suggest their own sentence?

BINGHAM: I can only regret the happy thought never occurred to me. I should have achieved fame with much less trouble, and without doubt my judgments would have been more equitable.

BROWN (*gasps, then in a whisper to* CROFTS): Getting old!

BINGHAM (*mischievously*): Eighty-one, to be exact. (BROWN *is considerably embarrassed.*) Come here, my girl. (*She moves over and stands by his chair.*) Have you got a husband?

THE GIRL: No.

BINGHAM: Who's your nearest relative?

THE GIRL: I don't know. I've never had any, I don't think.

BINGHAM: You're an orphan?

THE GIRL: Yes. My father died two years ago; my mother when I was small. He left hardly any money, so I went into business when he died. I'm a typist . . . private secretary to a man with a glass eye. A gipsy once told me I should work for a man with one eye.

BINGHAM: How did you get the job?

THE GIRL: I applied to an advertisement. It was pure cheek. I'd had no experience, and couldn't type. I learnt all that there.

BINGHAM: Why do you think you were accepted?

THE GIRL: I couldn't guess at the time. I soon learnt though. The chief liked the look of me!

BINGHAM: Had that anything to do with your embezzling this money?

THE GIRL: Something, I suppose. I don't know why I took it. I just had the chance: I'd never had the chance before: I just had the chance and suddenly went mad. I didn't know what I was going to do with it, or where to go, or anything. I only knew I'd got a bad headache and was ever so tired. I suppose I was hysterical. I felt sick, dead sick of poverty, of the chief, of the work, of everything. And so I just bolted. I don't think I quite realised what I'd done straight away, but when I did I was frightened. I wanted to go and put it back, but the office was shut by then. I wandered about the streets, feeling worse and worse; then I thought of old Jane Perry, my nurse; I thought I'd tell her all about it and she'd understand; so I caught a train and walked here from the station and found she was dead. (*With a wan smile.*) Then I met the butler.

HODGES: Why did you come back just now when you had the chance to go?

THE GIRL: I suppose it was cowardice. I haven't the nerve to be a good criminal. I felt tired. I didn't care what happened provided I could stop running away. So I came in here and—and just gave up.

BROWN (*touched*): Very sad, upon my soul.

HODGES: How old a man was your chief?

THE GIRL: I think about thirty-five, but his beard makes him look more.

HODGES: He has a beard, has he? Did he persecute you very seriously?

THE GIRL: I don't know about " very seriously."

HONEY: Well, to return to my question like a dog to his vomit, what do you suggest we do about you?

THE GIRL (*slowly, with a faint ray of hope*): Does that mean you'll help me?

HONEY: If it's possible.

BROWN: But is this moral, I ask you? I don't know that I'm a particularly hard man, indeed I'm very sorry for the girl. But pity's one thing, morality's another.

HONEY: Whose morality?

BROWN: What do you mean by " whose morality "? Are we all to have our own moralities next? It's like the people during the war who let religion interfere with their duty. These things must be kept separate.

HONEY: Admirably expressed. The law of the land says that this girl, who in one hysterical moment made a fool of herself, must be punished and tormented until she is hardened into an habitual criminal. Common sense says this will do no good to her nor to her country. The law of the land and common sense, again, must be kept separate. Permit me, however, to prefer common sense.

BROWN: You're deliberately twisting my words. You have a duty to the law of the land.

HONEY: And none to common sense?

BROWN: I don't pretend the law's infallible. Naturally. But—but—Sir Arthur, why should I be defending *your* profession?

BINGHAM: You do it so much better than I could. I can only say that, if people *will* have laws, they can only expect to suffer for it. The same applies to any other dangerous eccentricity.

BROWN (*at first inarticulate, waves his hand comprehensively*): And *there's* your Bench!

BINGHAM: My girl, you ask us to help you, and I'm sure we're all willing to do so, but . . .

BROWN: I refuse to be included!

BINGHAM: And I'm sure all of us except Mr. Brown are willing. . . .

BROWN: I—I—leave me out of it.

BINGHAM: I was endeavouring to do so. We have no desire to send you to gaol. In their saner moments people never do wish to send each other to gaol.

BROWN: I deny that. In my sanest moments I frequently wish to.

BINGHAM (*continuing smoothly*): And although legalised malevolence has been my chosen profession, fortunately I have never had to do so. I have nothing heavier on my conscience than separating a few mothers from their children—a perfectly praiseworthy proceeding had it not delivered the children into the loving and still more demoralising custody of their fathers. Mind you, I don't pretend that had I chosen another branch of law I should have scrupled to send a fellow-creature to prison or even to the gallows. There are few crimes to which the cynicism of an ambitious young man will not drive him and he doesn't stop short at torture and murder. But the point in hand is, young woman, what is there that we, with the best intention in the world, can possibly do for you?

HONEY: Can't we keep her here as though we don't know anything about it?

CROFTS: Bah, until it's all blown over, eh? And when the police come for her hide her in a sliding panel! Don't be romantic!

BROWN: Besides, do you imagine that I, at my time of life, am going to begin abetting embezzlement?

CROFTS: And I thought we were not to have a woman near the place for six months!

HONEY: The gods thought otherwise.

CROFTS (*grumbling*): If she were ill or anything there'd be some excuse for bothering about it. But she's perfectly fit in body and mind.

HONEY: She's probably not even that. She doesn't look it.

CROFTS: Oh, maybe she wants her dinner.

[HODGES *presses a bell.*

HODGES: As a matter of fact I think perhaps something *could* be done, but I am far from convinced that it ought to be.

[TRENT *comes in.*

We'll see, we'll see. Meanwhile, go off and get something to eat. Trent, ask the chef if he can find her something. (*To the* GIRL.) Will you go with Trent.

HONEY: And don't be rough with him.

[TRENT *draws himself up haughtily.*

CROFTS (*still grumbling*): I can see no excuse in the world. If everyone thinks they're entitled to steal just because they work for their living, a nice state of things we should have! Now if she'd been neglected or—or brought up sordidly, there'd be some shadow of excuse.

HONEY: How do you know she hasn't?

CROFTS: Well, she *seems* well enough brought up: speaks the King's English decently and so on.

THE GIRL: My upbringing *wasn't* very happy. I was decently educated, but I never knew my mother and father didn't understand children. He used to beat me and—and——

[*She seems on the verge of tears.* HODGES *signs to* TRENT *to take her away. They go out. But her last words were telling ones.*

BROWN (*impressed*): Dear, dear! Dear, dear, dear!

CROFTS (*with a bad grace*): Well, I suppose we'll have to give way.

BINGHAM: I suggest that first we hear what Hodges can do for her.

HODGES: I must ask you to excuse me details. I am able, if you all wish it, to protect our friend from the police, but there are reasons that make it impossible for me to explain how. You would agree with me, I know, if you knew them.

BROWN: Can you give me some assurance that I shall not be abetting crime?

HODGES: Every assurance. I would cut off my right hand sooner than endanger your immortal soul.

BROWN: Well, that's fair enough. Still, it's all a queerish business.

HODGES: One other thing. (*Uneasily.*) It would involve her staying here for a while—in some capacity or other.

[*There is a pause.*

BINGHAM: Oh.

HONEY: Oh.

[CROFTS *grunts.*

BROWN: Staying here?

[HODGES *nods.*

HONEY: What do you mean by "in some capacity or other"? You don't intend to marry her, do you?

BINGHAM: I shouldn't be surprised.

HODGES: I was thinking rather she might join the staff—in Nettlebank's place.

CROFTS: And a very sound idea too! The first sensible suggestion I've heard made this evening. Domestic service is a woman's proper place.

BROWN: But is it quite fair to the other servants? I know Annie wouldn't think of picking up a girl who admits she steals money, and putting her in the household. All the other maids would leave at once.

HODGES: My people won't do that. Besides, most of them have probably done a bit of it themselves some time or other . . . (*He picks up the wad of notes and begins counting them*) though not on such an heroic scale, I imagine.

BROWN: Think of Trent's feelings.

HODGES: I can't help that. Anyway, I don't want to press the thing. I just put it to you—what I for one am prepared to do—and you must decide what you like.

CROFTS: Well, I'm in favour of it.

BROWN: And I'm against it.

HONEY: So am I.

HODGES: Oho! And you were the chief champion a little while ago.

HONEY: If you knew the number of women I've championed when they were present and slanged behind their backs, that wouldn't surprise you.

CROFTS: It was you who first suggested she should stay.

HONEY: I know. And it was you who scorned the idea. I did suggest it, but it was a mistake. I was under a spell. Women in distress have a knack of looking so confoundedly pretty. Anyway, we said we'd have six months without women, and let's have it.

HODGES: Well, that's two for and two against. Yours the casting vote, Judge.

BINGHAM (*wakened from a reverie of quiet chuckles*): Eh? What's that? Me? Oh, I'm for it most emphatically. Let her come, let her come.

BROWN: Well, I've no desire to make myself objectionable. . .

CROFTS: Oh!

BROWN (*icily*): Do you wish to pass an observation?

CROFTS: I don't usually wait for an invitation.

BROWN: Thank you. I've no desire to stand out, Hodges. Let me withdraw my opposition.

HONEY: That makes four to one.

HODGES: Oh no, we don't want to overrule you like this. If any one of us feels . . .

BINGHAM (*dreamily*): You know, she reminds me of a girl I used to know over fifty years ago. Curious thing. There's something about—about the tilt of the nose, or that long thin eyebrow, or the way her hair clings at the neck, which looks so white by contrast; or . . . (*he looks to see the effect on* HONEY) or . . . I don't know what exactly it is. (*He pauses.*)

HONEY: I'll withdraw my opposition if you like then.

[*The* JUDGE *chuckles with undisguised delight.*

HODGES (*not satisfied*): But do you mean that? It's not merely to be amiable?

HONEY: No, it's not to be amiable. I mean it.

HODGES: Good. Then that's settled.

[*As* HONEY *passes the* JUDGE *he shakes his fist in the old man's face. The* JUDGE'S *chuckles become ecstatic. The door opens and* TRENT *comes in with the* GIRL.

You've been quick?

THE GIRL: I couldn't wait to eat. I wanted to know—to know what you'd decided.

HODGES: We've decided to offer you a temporary job on the staff here.

[TRENT *opens his eyes and shuts them again in pain.*

THE GIRL: Does that mean I shall be safe?

HODGES: If you behave. Have you any experience?

THE GIRL: No, but I can easily learn.

HODGES: Trent will show you your room now, and you can write for your luggage in the morning. I'm sorry to have to disappoint you, Trent.

[TRENT *inclines his head stiffly.*

By the way, what's your name?

THE GIRL: Crawford—Jean Crawford.

HODGES: All right, Crawford. You'd better go to bed now.

THE GIRL (*trying to speak without emotion*): I should like to thank you . . . but . . . I don't quite know what to say. I'm sure I shall . . .

HODGES: Don't thank me. Sir Arthur Bingham here is the man you've got to thank.

THE GIRL: Is that—Sir Arthur Bingham? You were my uncle's best friend before he died, then. My uncle was Lord Charles Campbell. I *do* thank you. I . . .

[*She is too overcome to finish, and goes out, handkerchief pressed to her nose, followed by* TRENT. *The effect of this bombshell is a long silence, with everybody's eyes fixed immovably on the door. It is broken by* BROWN, *appalled by the situation, with a note of real tragedy in his voice.*

BROWN (*helplessly*): Hodges!

BINGHAM (*pulling himself together and relighting his cigar which has gone out*): Against all the liars and hypocrites I have ever met I am fully prepared to back Miss Jean Crawford.

[*There is another pause.*

BROWN (*at length*): Do you mean she's *not* his niece then? Do say you mean that!

BINGHAM: Oh, she's his niece all right. I merely say that that's a most interesting young woman; that as a liar she's unquestionably first-rate.

BROWN (*trying hard to comprehend*): Do you mean to say she's —she's no good?

BINGHAM (*holding a lighted match between his fingers*): I was trying to imply something of the sort, yes.

[*Another pause.*

BROWN: I . . . I . . . I . . . (*But he is inarticulate.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same scene. The room is brightened by the addition of bowls of flowers. It is a hot summer evening three weeks later, not yet dusk. The three writing-desks are occupied by CROFTS, HODGES *and the* JUDGE. *On a circular leather settle in the centre sit, almost back to back,* HONEY *and* BROWN. HONEY *is sucking a pencil in contemplation of a writing-pad on his knee. His face, or the little we can see of it, is puckered. With the exception of* BROWN, *who adheres still to black jacket, striped trousers and starched shirt, everyone is dressed pre-eminently for comfort.* HODGES *wears far from immaculate white flannel trousers, black socks, heavy brown brogues, an old tweed coat, tennis shirt and Leander tie ;* HONEY, *the shabbiest grey flannel trousers and stained black velvet jacket, pumps, no tie, and, for some reason, no socks ;* CROFTS *affects "plus-fours" and an old-fashioned scarlet golf-coat ; and even the* JUDGE *is in a tweed Norfolk jacket and cycling breeches, with a soft collar and country gaiters.* BROWN *has nothing to do and obviously resents the others' pre-occupation. Apart from the scratching of pens there is absolute silence, and* BROWN *from time to time attempts to relieve the monotony by crossing the other leg. His left wrist apparently is a source of irritation also, for he keeps scratching it. At length he ventures a remark.*

BROWN (*pleasantly*): Very hot. (*There is no shadow of a response. After a little he continues in a conversational key.*) I say it's a very hot evening. (*No reply. He sighs and mutters.*) Very hot . . . as I was saying to-night at dinner. (*Then recrosses his legs. A pause, then patiently*) *Too* hot, *I* think. (*No one disputes this. He scratches his wrist and adds querulously*) Lot of mosquitoes this weather. (*No reply.*) It's the heat, you know. (*He submits the wrist to a prolonged examination.*) You know, I wouldn't be surprised if it weren't an ordinary common heat-spot. (*This causes no sensation.*) Not a bit surprised. (*No answer. He repeats with a touch of irritation*) Not a bit. (*He glances over his shoulder at* HONEY.) Finished that yet?

HONEY (*shaking his head without looking up*): Sh!

[BROWN *frowns and after a while tries* HODGES.

BROWN: How are you getting on, Hodges?

HODGES (*absent-mindedly*): Eh?

[BROWN *hugs himself with indignation. At length :*)

BROWN (*peremptorily*): Crofts!

[CROFTS *grunts, and* BROWN *jumps to his feet and paces the floor indignantly.*

I've *never* been treated like this! Anyone would think I was dirt! Dirt! Anyone would think I had no right to be alive! Damn it all, at home I am treated with some respect. Annie does at least answer when I speak to her! I don't want much attention, but—but, well, our *dog* gets more than I get here! (*He paces a little more.*) Which reminds me; our dog gets a jolly sight too much. Damn this wrist! (*He scratches it violently, and then puts it in his mouth. No one has paid the slightest heed to this monologue, and he grumbles on.*) And no one has the least sympathy, not the least! (*He paces in silence for a while.*) Wish you could get an evening paper in this God-forsaken place. (*He comes eventually to a halt behind* HODGES' *chair and looks over his shoulder.*

BROWN: What's that word before 'emetic'?

HODGES: Before 'emetic'? I haven't used the word.

BROWN: Oh! Then what's that? (*He points.*)

HODGES (*disagreeably*): It's all one word—"cosmetic."

BROWN: Well, there ought to be a comma after it.

HODGES (*settling down again*): There oughtn't.

[BROWN *roves on to the next desk,* CROFTS', *whose work he overlooks with palpable scorn.*

BROWN (*reading out a chapter-title contemptuously*): "Adventures on the Nile"! Adventures on the Nile! Bh! And the naughty crocodile came and gobbled him right up! Bah!

CROFTS (*angrily*): If you want to be facetious, that's no reason why you should puff down my neck.

BROWN (*haughtily, as he moves off*): I've no desire to puff down your neck. You flatter yourself. No desire whatever.

[*He comes to rest at* HONEY'S *elbow, where he reads for some time, until gradually first his head, then his hand, begin to beat the rhythm of the metre.* HONEY *bears it patiently.*

Do you know, I like that.

HONEY (*without interest*): Do you.

BROWN: Yes, I like it very much. There's a swing about it.

HONEY: Is there?

BROWN: Yes, a distinct swing.

HONEY (*sighing*): I've tried so hard to avoid a swing.

BROWN (*encouragingly*): Ah, nonsense; poetry wants a bit of a swing. The more the better, *I* think. You know, my youngest-born, Olivia, used to make up poetry.

HONEY (*patiently*): Did she?

BROWN: Yes. Very good it was, too. Of course, only when she was a little girl; not since she's put her hair up.

HONEY: No, of course not.

BROWN: I mean, I don't suppose the quality was quite so good as yours.

HONEY: Oh, it's only a question of taking trouble.

BROWN: I suppose so. She never did, I'm afraid. I'd like you to see some of her things.

HONEY: I should count myself happy.

BROWN: I remember the very first piece she wrote; forget what it was called. I only know it began:

"Oh, what a beautiful cake!
It must have took hours to bake."

Of course, that was before she knew anything about cooking.

HONEY: Also, I imagine, before she knew anything about grammar.

BROWN: Oh, she knew " took " was bad grammar, but she says, if you want to make a thing scan you can do things like that in poetry. What was it she called it?

HONEY: Poetic licentiousness perhaps.

BROWN (*distrait*): Something like that. Something like that.

[HONEY *heaves a heavy sigh as* BROWN *meanders off and finally halts behind the* JUDGE'S *chair. He has not been there long when the* JUDGE *takes a half-turn in his seat, and removes his spectacles to enquire :*

BINGHAM: You are very kind to take so much interest in my private correspondence?

BROWN (*immensely embarrassed*): Good heavens! I'd no idea, Judge. You must forgive me. Pure absence of mind, I assure you.

[*The* JUDGE, *eyes twinkling, grunts and turns again to his letters.* BROWN, *a little out of countenance, continues his pacing, softly murmuring*] Stupid of me. [*until his wrist again claims his attention. Eventually a scarlet book on the settle catches his eye. He picks it up and reads the title aloud with heavy contempt.*

BROWN: " The Crime of Devil's Creek; a thrilling detective yarn by Basil Vane " ! To whom does this trash belong? (*He drops it scornfully on the settle.*)

BINGHAM (*without looking up*): To the learned Judge.

BROWN (*after recovering from the shock, with a comprehensive gesture*): And *there's* your Bench! (*For a little while he continues to sit idle ; then his eye roves towards the book and he picks it up indifferently. Superciliously he turns over a few pages but is very soon absorbed in it. However,* TRENT *interrupts by bringing in a telegram.*) For me?

TRENT: No, sir.

BROWN: Anything for me?

TRENT: No, sir.

[BROWN *is disgusted, and* TRENT *hands the telegram to* HODGES, *who reads it with perplexity.*

HODGES: Now, what the devil does this mean? (*To the others.*) It's from Addleshaw saying he's arriving by the 9.13 to-night.

BROWN: A bit late to wire that.

HODGES: Yes, but that's not the point. As a matter of fact, he seems to have sent it off in good time. The point is I wrote to put him off.

HONEY: Well, you've failed, that's all.

HODGES: He couldn't have got my letter. (*He begins going through the papers in his pocket.*) I wrote it days ago. (*He finds the letter and flings it down on the desk.*) No wonder! Whenever I try to post a letter myself, this happens.

BROWN: You never posted it? (*His laughter is uncontrolled.*)

HODGES (*to* TRENT): It's too late to meet him at the station now?

TRENT (*consulting the clock*): Yes, sir.

HODGES: Very well. Have a room ready, will you?

TRENT: Yes, sir.

CROFTS: I suppose you haven't seen an evening paper, Trent?

TRENT: No, sir.

CROFTS: You haven't heard how Lancashire's doing against Surrey by any chance?

TRENT: Last I heard, sir, was Surrey all out for 393. 'Obbs in superb form.

CROFTS: Grr! That was yesterday. I want to know what's happened to-day.

TRENT (*huffed*): Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*

HODGES (*still thinking of* ADDLESHAW): Presumably he'll take a taxi, and if I leave here (*he contemplates the clock*) in, say, twenty minutes, I should be certain to catch him in Harrington Lane, shouldn't I?

BROWN: Just about.

[*The others are back at work, and* HODGES *turns again to his.* BROWN *glowers at the prospect of another silence, but* CROFTS *breaks it.*

CROFTS (*to* BROWN): I suppose *you* haven't heard anything?

BROWN: What do you mean by "anything"?

CROFTS: To-day's cricket.

BROWN (*with hauteur*): I have not.

CROFTS: And it wouldn't interest you if you had, eh?

BROWN (*still remote*): It would not. I don't pretend to a taste for athletics. I neither wish to go deliberately out of my way to perspire unnecessarily nor watch other people doing so.

[CROFTS *grunts his contempt.*

I suppose *you* don't happen to have heard what "Mexican Eagles" are doing to-day?

CROFTS: I imagine pretty well what they do any other day. They don't interest me. I've never been to Mexico—nor to the Zoo. (*He returns to his work.*)

BROWN: Ha, what ignorance! Travellers are astoundingly parochial.

HONEY: Hodges, I've come up against a snag. I can't write a single line with any confidence to-day. All this chatter makes it impossible. Look here, here's a line I can't make up my mind about, and it's hanging up the whole thing. Would you say "Coiled hair of melting gold," or "Coiled hair of molten gold"? You see, I rather want to use "melting" just after for a rhyme.

HODGES (*after a pause, without looking up*): Half a minute.

[HONEY *tosses his head impatiently and waits.*

HONEY (*after a while*): Well?

HODGES (*still writing*): Well, what is it?

HONEY: Damn it, I've told you!

HODGES: Eh? Afraid I wasn't listening.

HONEY (*controlling himself*): Would you say "Coiled hair of melting gold," or "Coiled hair of molten gold"?

HODGES (*at once, without looking up or giving the thing a thought*): Oh, "molten gold," my dear man, "molten gold" every time.

HONEY (*angrily*): Hodges, you're insufferable when you're writing! You won't stop for anyone. I ask you a serious question and you're too damned selfish even to consider it.

HODGES (*at last attending*): I've told you "molten"! "Molten," "molten," "molten." I always use "molten" and always shall. Isn't that enough for you?

HONEY: No, it is not. If you'd taken the slightest interest you'd have wanted to know the context.

HODGES: Well, I can't write your poetry for you and my essay at the same time! Only a monomaniac would expect me to break off from my work to do his. Do I ask you or anybody else to balance my sentences for me?

HONEY: You don't, and look at the result!

BROWN (*delighted*): Come, come! Now, now, now, now, now, now, now! "Birds in their little nest agree." Now *you* know what it's like not to be answered when you speak to someone.

HONEY: There's some difference in blithering about the weather and asking a serious question.

BROWN: "Blithering"! So I blither, do I! You and your melting gold! What is that but blithering, pray? It doesn't even mean anything!

HONEY: Well, if molten gold doesn't mean anything to you . . .

BROWN: You said "melting."

CROFTS: How the devil you think I can write with you all squabbling like a menagerie, I don't know. What the deuce does it matter which you put? Put one or the other and be done with it. (*He turns to his manuscript.*) No one's going to read it. (*He starts searching among a chaos of notebooks and papers.*) Now I've lost that confounded sheet of dates. . . . All through helping you! (*He searches violently. There is silence once more, with poor* BROWN *still unoccupied. At last he resolves to take a firm line, and rings the bell.* TRENT *answers it.*

TRENT (*to* HODGES): Yes, sir?

BROWN: *I* rang, Trent. (*Defiantly glaring round the room.*) You might tell Crawford I want her, please.

TRENT: Yes, sir.

[*As he goes out, four pairs of eyes—two of them over spectacles,* CROFTS' *and* BINGHAM'S—*turn and focus themselves on* BROWN.

HONEY: What do you want Crawford for?

CROFTS: Yes, what do you want Crawford for?

BROWN (*airily*): Don't let me interrupt your writing. (*They unwillingly resume, but now his nerve fails him slightly. He clears his throat.*) I'm going to do rather an outrageous thing, Hodges. (*They all look at him again.*) Subject to your permission, of course.

HONEY (*with mock awe*): Whatever is he going to do? I shudder to think.

BROWN (*with much dignity*): I propose, Hodges, to—er—to converse with your servant for a few moments. Have I your permission?

HODGES (*perplexed*): Why, certainly: you do what you like.

HONEY: But whatever about?

BROWN: I've no idea. But no doubt some topic or other will arise.

CROFTS: But this is absurd, and—and—outrageous! You can't have an ordinary chat with the housemaid and—and . . .

BROWN: Doubtless if you had been more sociable it would never have been necessary.

CROFTS: And am I to sit quietly by while—while—— (*He checks himself, for* CRAWFORD, *in cap and apron, comes in. They all turn hurriedly to their work, and she waits, expectant.*)

BROWN (*very much embarrassed*): It was I who sent for you, Crawford.

CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. (*He dare not look at her.*)

BROWN (*desperately*): Er . . . what time is it, do you know?

CRAWFORD: Ten minutes to nine, sir. I think this clock is right.

[*With a shaking hand he winds his watch.*

BROWN (*clearing his throat*): Very hot to-night.

CRAWFORD (*puzzled*): Yes, sir.

BROWN: *Too* hot, *I* think.

CRAWFORD: Perhaps a little, sir.

BROWN (*feeling all is not going too well*): Are—er—you fond of bathing?

CRAWFORD (*thoroughly perplexed*): Not very, sir.

BROWN: Nor am I. (*His embarrassment is pathetic, and a suspicion that he hears* CROFTS *mutter "fool" does not relieve it.*) It must have been pretty bad in London to-day.

CRAWFORD: Yes, sir.

BROWN: Worse in Paris, for the matter of that. Always worse in Paris.

HONEY (*quietly*): Worse still in Madrid.

BROWN: Do you know Paris at all?

CRAWFORD: Me, sir?

BROWN: Yes.

CRAWFORD: No, I've never been there, sir.

BROWN: Oh, you'd like it. I've had many amusing times in Paris. Never could get the hang of the language though. I remember once I ruined a new suit because I couldn't think of the French for serviette! (*He laughs bravely.* CRAWFORD *longs to help him out but cant comprehend the situation.*) Just shews the thing's not as difficult as it would seem.

CRAWFORD (*very worried*): No, sir. (*There is a ghastly pause. Then she has an inspiration.*) Mexican Eagles are up a little to-night, sir.

BROWN (*grasping the straw gratefully*): Are they really? Excellent. How much?

CRAWFORD: A quarter.

BROWN: Better than nothing. Better than nothing. I thought they would, you know.

CROFTS: Confound that sheet of dates! I can't get on without them. (*He rummages again.*)

CRAWFORD (*picking up a leaf from the floor*): Is this it, sir?

CROFTS (*inspecting it*): Yes, by Jove, it is. Where the deuce was it?

CRAWFORD: Under your feet, sir.

CROFTS: Thank you. Good girl, good girl.

CRAWFORD: Lancashire are all out for 137, sir.

CROFTS (*all attention*): No! You don't mean it! They've had to follow on then?

CRAWFORD: I think so, sir.

CROFTS: Splendid! That'll teach the blighters. Who took the wickets? How do you know?

CRAWFORD: The chauffeur's been to Harrington, sir, and brought back the evening paper. (*She has it in her hand.*)

CROFTS: Good. Let's have a look at it. (*But* BROWN *is before him.*)

BROWN (*triumphantly*): I shan't be long. (*He opens it.*)

BINGHAM (*with charming courtesy*): I wonder would you object to my just glancing at the headlines before it gets dark? My physician hates me to read by electric light.

BROWN (*surrendering it with a bad grace*): Not at all. (*He is furious.*)

HONEY: I don't know if you take any interest in poetry, Crawford?

CRAWFORD: I read it a good deal, sir.

HONEY: Well, I wonder if you'd give me your judgment on a small point. Which do you think the better phrase . . .

CROFTS (*sighing*): Oh, God!

HONEY (*firmly*): "Coiled hair of melting gold" or "Coiled hair of molten gold"?

CROFTS (*without looking up*): Or "Boiled hare of moulting gold"?

HONEY (*ignoring him*): You see, I want if possible to save "melting" for later on.

CRAWFORD: Still, I think I should use it here, sir, if you can. Of course, I ought really to know the context.

HONEY (*delighted*): Exactly. But don't you think "molten" has a finer ring about it?

CRAWFORD: Well, coming just before "gold," isn't it a trifle florid? Also, there's a hint of journalese about it, sir. *The Daily Mail* might use "molten" but never "melting."

HONEY (*marking his pad*): Yes, you're quite right. You're perfectly right. One's own judgment gets blurred, you know.

CRAWFORD: Yes, of course, sir. (*To* BROWN.) Is there anything, else, sir?

BROWN: Yes, there was something. Let me see. What were we talking about?

[*But* CROFTS, *who has had enough, determines to intervene.*

CROFTS (*gruffly*): Er—Crawford, I see you smashed my tooth-glass again this morning. That's the second time in a week.

CRAWFORD: Yes, I'm sorry, sir. I've just put a new one in.

CROFTS (*gently grumbling*): Yes, that's all very well, but I don't want to get a lump of glass in my foot one fine morning.

[BROWN *seems uncomfortable.*

BROWN (*sullenly*): What do you want to browbeat the girl for for a little thing like that?

CROFTS (*turning on him*): Who's browbeating the girl? And what the devil has it to do with you, I should like to know?

BROWN: A great deal. To begin with, she never broke your wretched tooth-glass.

CROFTS: Oh! it broke itself, did it?

BROWN: No, I broke it.

[CROFTS, *amazed, takes off his glasses to contemplate* BROWN *more clearly. By now everyone is attending.*

CROFTS (*with ominous calm*): And what in the name of all that's holy were *you* doing in my bedroom? Do you spend much of your time there, might I ask?

CRAWFORD (*trying to smooth things over*): Mr. Brown's joking, sir. Of course, I broke your glass.

BROWN: I am not joking. Hodges, I broke the glass. I broke both of them. I shall probably break the next. I . . . (*He is at a loss to explain.*)

HODGES: But how?

BROWN (*taking the bull by the horns*): I'll tell you how. I passed by the open door when Crawford was at work and, having nothing to do, I went in to lend her a hand. There!

HODGES (*amazed*): What! (*The others look sheepish.*)

BROWN: Yes, and I'm not ashamed of it. The work's too much for her.

CRAWFORD (*distressed*): Oh, it isn't, it isn't!

BROWN: I say she's not equal to it. She was not brought up to that kind of work.

CRAWFORD: Oh, but I can do it quite easily. Really.

HODGES: But this is all ludicrous! (*Sternly to* CRAWFORD.) Did you ask Mr. Brown to help you?

CRAWFORD: No, I asked him not to.

BROWN: She did. She begged me not to. Mind you, I'm not the only one, if I'm not mistaken. (*He glares at* CROFTS, *who covers his confusion by wiping his glasses.*) Didn't I see you putting the things away in the hall yesterday?

[HODGES *gapes.*

CROFTS (*coughing a good deal*): One doesn't want to give unnecessary trouble. May as well be as tidy as one can.

HODGES: And what about you, Honey?

HONEY: I've also been "as tidy as I can"; yes. I only regret not having done more than I have.

[HODGES *glances at the* JUDGE, *who chuckles and shakes his head.*

HODGES (*resolutely, at last*): I understand. (*To* CRAWFORD.) You've been posing as the pathetic, lonely orphan, I suppose, and cajoling my guests to . . .

HONEY (*controlling his anger*): You don't understand in the least. There's been no posing or pathos about it. If there's any posing to be done, you may count on me to do it. We've realised, and you should have realised too, that we made a mistake and put a square peg in a round hole. I'm only ashamed not to have brought the thing up before. I congratulate Brown on doing so. (*To* BROWN.) Your youngest-born, Olivia, should be proud of you.

HODGES: I see. You've Lord Charles Campbell on your conscience, eh?

HONEY: Nonsense. Don't be vulgar. You know quite well it's nothing of the kind. I wouldn't care if a coal-heaver were her uncle. The girl's a lady in taste, in manner, in breeding, in thought and everything. And you know it. Really at times you make it very difficult for me to maintain my flippancy. It was outrageous ever to have made her do menial service.

CRAWFORD: It wasn't, it wasn't. I'm perfectly capable of doing it.

HODGES: I should have thought it were preferable to gaol.

CROFTS: You've no right to say that. I stand by Honey in everything he says.

BROWN: So do I.

CRAWFORD: Oh, please drop the subject and let things be! It's ever so kind of you all, but I'd so far rather . . .

HODGES (*ignoring her rudely, finally*): Very well. You shall have your way. Have you nothing to say first, Judge?

BINGHAM (*who has been quietly enjoying the scene*): Oh, I knew this would happen soon.

HODGES: And you agree?

BINGHAM: I agree that the girl is in every way refined.

HODGES: Then how is it you have raised no objection?

BINGHAM: Because I have yet to be convinced that refinement must needs suffer from domestic service or—what is more important—vice versa. Most members of my profession, for instance, are quite unspeakably refined—none more so—and look at the kind of work they have to do! But don't misunderstand me. I emphatically welcome your decision.

HODGES: Good. (*To* CRAWFORD.) Then I may set you free from your duties at once. You are no longer in danger from the police, and a train leaves Harrington at 10.51 in the morning. Ask me for a month's wages before you go. That will do, thank you.

[*Everyone is staggered, and* HONEY *jumps to his feet.* CRAWFORD *turns very pale, but manages to mutter "Yes, sir," and goes out.*

HONEY (*excitedly*): I—I—why did you do that?

HODGES: That seems a curious question, doesn't it?

BROWN (*distressed*): But you *can't* do that!

HODGES: Oh! How much further do you all propose to interfere in my private domestic arrangements?

BROWN: But it makes me feel *I'm* to blame! It was I who brought the whole thing up after all, and I've no wish to lose the girl her job.

HODGES: Oh, haven't you? Then I must have misunderstood you. I thought you said I had no right to keep her on my staff.

BROWN: So I did, but . . . Anyway, what's she going to do now?

HODGES: I don't see that that's my affair. No doubt she'll start typing again.

CROFTS (*sulkily*): And what kind of reference will her last firm give her?

[HODGES *shrugs.*

HONEY: Do you realise you may be sending that girl wrong? How is she to earn her living?

HODGES: I don't know what you mean by "*sending* her wrong." She went wrong before I ever met her. I saved her from gaol.

HONEY: To send her to something worse.

HODGES (*a little shaken*): You exaggerate my influence. Your imagination is carrying you away.

BROWN: Well, you can do what you like, naturally; but I wish it to be on record that I protest most strongly, most strongly.

CROFTS: So do I, most strongly. First sensible thing I've heard Brown say.

BROWN (*snappily*): Oh, is it! Well, no one asked you to say so.

BINGHAM: Allow me a few words. Hodges, am I right in believing that in order to save the young woman's skin it was not essential to keep her here?

HODGES (*surprised*): What makes you think that?

BINGHAM: A theory of mine: mere conjecture. Am I right? Was it absolutely necessary for her to stay here?

HODGES (*unwillingly*): Not absolutely, no.

BINGHAM: Exactly. And may I be allowed to suggest your motives in keeping her here?

HODGES (*seeing no alternative*): If you wish.

BINGHAM: They were precisely the same as mine in agreeing with you.

[HODGES *is slightly relieved.*

You said to yourself, Here am I, writing an essay on female psychology, and by an amazing stroke of luck I am offered the chance of studying it at first hand and in exceptional circumstances, in a crude and elementary form. Here is a woman, whom terror has

stripped of frills and fripperies and pretences and shams; how will she conduct herself in a household of men, who know her for a common thief and have seen her inmost soul naked? You regarded her as a biologist regards his guinea-pig, eh?

HODGES: Exactly. Those were precisely my motives.

BINGHAM: Quite. Well, I would suggest that the situation has not altered; or rather it has developed, it is unfolding itself. For my part I should be most vexed if you were to cut it short now. Indeed, these last few days, for the first time in my life, I have thought myself to be within an ace of understanding woman.

HODGES: Well, you can call it personal prejudice if you like; perhaps it is. Certainly there's no logical reason why she should go, except that we had promised ourselves an all-man holiday. But I'm quite ready to confess I have a strong personal dislike for the girl. She jars on me.

BINGHAM (*gently*): Are you quite sure you're not afraid of her?

HODGES (*startled*): Afraid? No, I don't know that I'm afraid. What do you mean?

BINGHAM: Let us all be quite frank with ourselves. We thought we should like six months without a woman, but the first one that comes along convinced us that we shouldn't. So we took her in: you and I because we wanted our guinea-pig, Crofts out of the goodness of his heart, Brown because he knows in his inmost soul that he was never born to be a bachelor, and Honey because he's a young man with warm blood in his veins and she was a fine young woman.

HONEY: My dear Judge, I protest . . .

BINGHAM: No you don't, young man; you're too clever to want to dissemble. But do any of you regret it? Crofts?

CROFTS: I don't.

BINGHAM: Brown?

BROWN: Nor me.

HONEY: Nor I.

BINGHAM: Nor I. Well, Hodges?

HODGES (*deeply worried*): I don't know. I can't make up my mind.

BINGHAM: Confess; has she not upset your essay just a little?

HODGES: In certain parts. But it would be absurd to generalise from the particular.

BINGHAM: Yet all philosophy and science consists of that process. Think of the anti-climax when she's gone! Crofts will have no one to find his papers for him or talk cricket with, Honey will have no one to write his verses for him, and as for me, all the detective yarns in the world won't recompense me for the loss of my guinea-pig. (*Quietly.*) And you'll miss something, something indefinable. You know it.

HODGES (*coming to decision*): Very well. I'll compromise. She can stay here till she finds a job. (*He rings the bell.*)

HONEY: In the meantime, is there any reason why she shouldn't be typing some of our stuff for us?

HODGES (*trying to repress his bad temper*): She can be doing yours and Crofts'! Mine isn't ready yet.

[TRENT *comes in.*

Ask Crawford to come here, please.

[*He goes out.*

I must go and meet Addleshaw. I'm late already. Tell her she can stay here temporarily; that she will be treated as a private secretary, and—and—damn it, where's my cap? . . . and tell her, for God's sake, not to obtrude her sex!

[*He goes into the dining-room after his cap.* BROWN *seats himself in an easy chair. The* JUDGE *rises, his letters in his hand.*

BINGHAM (*stopping in front of* BROWN *and smiling affably*): So I'm just too late, am I? *I* was going to sit there. However, youth will be served, eh? Youth will be served. (BROWN *knows from experience that resistance is futile, and, glaring at the* JUDGE, *he gets up without a word. The latter settles himself comfortably, murmuring*

belatedly :) Oh, don't move, please! I insist. It's very kind of you, but I'd rather not. (*He sighs luxuriously.*) I hate to turn you out.

[*He settles down to the paper, while* BROWN, *inarticulate with rage, stormps about the room.* CRAWFORD *comes in. She appears to have been crying, and is without her cap and apron. She looks very attractive in her plain, black, high-necked dress with its white lawn collar and cuffs.*

CRAWFORD: Mr. Hodges sent for me?

HONEY (*not quite at ease*): Yes; then he retired according to plan, as they used to say. We've just been talking the thing over, and we thought that if you cared to stay here and do a little typing for us until you find a job to your liking, that—that we should be very glad.

BROWN: *Very* glad. Eh, Crofts?

CROFTS: Certainly.

HONEY: It was the Judge's idea. What do you say?

[*She half turns away, gazing out of the window, not quite trusting herself to say anything.*

CRAWFORD (*at last*): I wish . . . I could say . . . what I want to say. I think you're all . . . too wonderful.

BROWN: Nonsense, nonsense. Nothing wonderful about me. Ask Annie.

HONEY: Then you'll stay?

CRAWFORD: I should like to stay with you all always, and work for you too. But . . . well, Mr. Hodges doesn't want me, for one thing.

BROWN: Oh, yes he does, I assure you. He's changed his mind. What was that he said about a guinea-pig, Honey?

HONEY: Is that all that's stopping you?

CRAWFORD: I've given too much trouble already. I shall only give more. Perhaps it's better for me to go. You wanted an all-man holiday.

HONEY: And we don't now. We've said we all want you to stay.

CRAWFORD: And Mr. Hodges?

[HODGES *comes in.*

HODGES (*briskly*): What's that? Do I want you to stay? Yes, I'm quite reconciled! (*He goes off out of the window to meet* ADDLESHAW *as he says it.*) You win the first round; on points.

[*He is gone. The taunt pulls her together and knocks the sentiment out of her.*

CRAWFORD (*accepting the challenge*): I think . . . I'll stay.

BROWN: That's it. That's the sensible thing. From now on a new era begins. (*Paternally.*) To-morrow, my dear, you shall have breakfast with me, eh?

HONEY: Don't you take breakfast in bed on Sunday mornings? I'm ashamed of you.

[BROWN *is embarrassed,* CROFTS *delighted.*

CRAWFORD (*cutting in*): I hope there's lots of work to do.

HONEY (*cheerfully*): Oh, we'll keep you busy enough. Hodges says you're not to obtrude your sex, so you shan't have a chance We'll still have an all-man holiday.

BROWN: Yes, why not? (*Jocularly.*) Be a man, my dear, be a man! Damn this wrist!

CRAWFORD (*inspecting it*): What is it? Oh, that's a bad one. Mosquito bite.

BROWN (*intently*): Or heat-spot? Which do you think?

CROFTS (*disgustedly*): Fleas!

CRAWFORD: No, only children have heat-spots. Anyway, I've got the very thing. You wait here.

[*She goes out, leaving* BROWN *delighted with the prospect of being fussed.*

CROFTS (*contemptuously*): Heat-spots!

BROWN (*defiantly*): Yes, heat-spots.

CROFTS: Who wants a game of clock-golf before it's too dark?

HONEY: It's too dark already.

CROFTS: No, it's not too dark. If you turn on the lights in the dining-room the whole clock is lit up. I played on Tuesday at this hour.

HONEY: No, I'm tired.

CROFTS (*grunts and is about to ask the* JUDGE, *but* BINGHAM *has fallen asleep. To* BROWN): Of course, *you* don't play.

BROWN (*remotely*): I don't. (*Hurt.*) Besides, I've got fleas.

CROFTS (*ungraciously*): I don't mind teaching you, if you like

BROWN: I don't wish to learn.

CROFTS: No, you wouldn't.

HONEY: Come along, I'll give you a game.

[*They go out into the garden.* CRAWFORD *comes in with a bottle and a bandage. She kneels down by his chair and begins to doctor the wrist.*

CRAWFORD: This is a special kind of lavender water. It will take down the swelling in no time. Now pull up your sleeve, sir.

BROWN: No more "sirs." "Pull up your sleeve, *Brown.*" Don't forget you're a man now, eh!

CRAWFORD: Well, anyway, pull up your sleeve.

BROWN: Say "Brown" then.

CRAWFORD: Brown.

[*Very much tickled, he pulls up his sleeve.*

BROWN: Lavender water, is it?

CRAWFORD: A special kind. It keeps insects off in the hot weather, and cures their bite.

BROWN: Annie always uses Pond's. You know Pond's?

CRAWFORD: Of course I do, and very good too.

BROWN: Annie swears by it. That's one thing I *will* say for Annie. She's a very good nurse. Give her her due. Always ready to take trouble. Not that *I* ever need anything, you know. But there are the children, always the children. . . .

CRAWFORD: I'm sure you miss her here.

BROWN (*sighing*): Oh, I wouldn't say that. You see, I'm a very independent kind of man.

CRAWFORD (*with feigned ecstasy*): Yes, but still I often think married people are very lucky; married life must be rather wonderful!

BROWN (*intrigued*): Do you really? I don't know that I ever looked at it quite like that. I suppose we married folk do have some advantages. We don't get crusty like that chap Crofts, or utterly selfish like the Judge.

[BINGHAM *smiles without opening his eyes.*

I tell you frankly, I'm not used to being turned out of the best chair or robbed of the evening paper. And if there's a chicken I expect to have the wing.

CRAWFORD (*patting the bandage*): Tell me a little about Annie. I've an idea she and I would get on well.

BROWN (*quite carried away*): Have you really? Of course, I admit she has her good points, but when I think of that coffee-bean business——

CRAWFORD: What does she look like?

BROWN: Look like? Well, when I married her she was quite a beauty, really. She was what they used to call in those days a "very fine figure of a woman." Of course, she was only a girl when we were married, but she seemed more. People used to say there was something Spanish about her. She had sleek black hair and great flashing eyes: then as a kind of queer contrast she had the sweetest English smile you ever saw. It was her smile that fetched me, I assure you; I didn't care a bit about the Spanish part.

CRAWFORD: She must have been lovely.

BROWN: She was, I promise you, though it's not for me to say so. She was of good family, too. I always say she could have married anyone she pleased, anyone.

CRAWFORD: And she chose you.

BROWN (*sobered*): Yes, it does seem rather awful, doesn't it? When you think what she might have been and then think that she's spent the best years of her life in a Surbiton villa, looking after seven daughters and a commonplace old cove like me! For, mind you, she's got intellect, has Annie. And education. And I've got neither: I admit it. I'm not a proper companion for her at all really, you know.

CRAWFORD: Has she changed much?

BROWN: *I* don't think so. Her smile's still exactly the same. Another thing. Nothing upsets her. She's got no temper at all, that woman. Sometimes she pretends to have, just to frighten the children, you know, but that's all.

CRAWFORD: Didn't you tell me she wrote to you after you came here?

BROWN (*a little guiltily*): Yes, I had a letter—about the girls and so on.

CRAWFORD: Don't you think you should have answered it?

BROWN: I did answer it.

CRAWFORD: You told me you didn't intend to.

BROWN: Nor did I. But I changed my mind and sent a postcard.

CRAWFORD: Only a postcard?

BROWN: Well, if you knew how she behaved over that coffee——

CRAWFORD: I do know. You've told me heaps of times. I think it was all a silly misunderstanding. (*Coaxing.*) You write her a nice long letter in the morning.

BROWN: I don't see why I should take the first step.

CRAWFORD: Because you want to write. You know you do. You've got lots you want to say. You can tell her all about Mr. Crofts and Sir Arthur and the rest of them. And how you've been keeping criminals out of prison and heaps of things. And you're dying to hear from her, too.

BROWN (*unwillingly*): I wouldn't mind a line of news about them all.

CRAWFORD: You write then. Promise.

BROWN: I may. I'll think it over.

CRAWFORD: I shall take that as a promise. (*Getting up.*) Now I must put these things away. How's the wrist?

BROWN: Feeling a trifle better, thank you.

CRAWFORD: It'll be all right in the morning.

[She goes out with her bottle and BROWN *paces pensively. Then he takes a long look at the* JUDGE, *a horrible suspicion having crossed his mind, but the old man gives no sign.* TRENT *comes in, followed by a large man with a brown beard and plenty of flesh about him. He has a loud boisterous voice.*

BROWN: Hallo, Addleshaw! Where's Hodges? Didn't you meet him?

[He turns on the light, for it is more than dusk by now.

ADDLESHAW: How are you? No, not a sign of him. I expected something to meet me at the station. (*Good-humouredly.*) Rotten hospitality, I call it.

BROWN: Well, the fact is we didn't expect you. And your telegram's only just arrived.

ADDLESHAW: Didn't expect me? Why, good heavens above, the invitation's weeks old.

BROWN: I know, but he wrote to put you off and forgot to post the letter.

ADDLESHAW: Did he, b'Jove? Is he short of room?

BROWN (*pleasantly*): I don't think so. I don't think so. Wonderful weather, isn't it? Hodges went to meet you in Harrington Lane. You don't know Harrington Lane, of course, do you?

ADDLESHAW: I'm afraid not.

BROWN: No, I thought not. Oh well, it's of no account. It's just a lane near here that leads to Harrington.

ADDLESHAW: And I don't know Harrington.

[CROFTS *comes in, putter in hand.*

BROWN: No, quite, quite. (*Vaguely.*) You'll want to see your room, eh? This is a kind of living-room. That's the dining-room through there. Er—that's the garden out there, of course—er—and that's Crofts. I don't know if you've already met. Mr. Crofts, Mr. Addleshaw.

ADDLESHAW: How do you do? Pleased to meet you, sir.

CROFTS (*sourly*): How d'ye do?

ADDLESHAW: You must have been having wonderful weather down here?

BROWN (*with the rather distrait air of a museum guide*): If you follow me, I'll show you your room. Oh, that's Sir Arthur Bingham. At present he's asleep. He'll wake up later. A peculiar man. The place is filled with peculiar men. If I'm not careful I hall grow peculiar myself.

[*He goes out, followed by* ADDLESHAW, *much amused.* CROFTS *tries to take the paper from the* JUDGE'S *hand, but it is clutched so tightly that after several attempts he gives it up for fear of waking him and flops into a chair in deep dudgeon.* CRAWFORD *comes in looking for something.*

CROFTS: Who's that? Crawford?

CRAWFORD: Yes. I think I left my scissors here.

CROFTS (*fidgeting in his seat*): I don't know why Hodges should see fit to have only one comfortable chair in the house. He might know the Judge would monopolise it. (*He feels her slip a cushion under his head, and his frown is slowly transformed into a contented smile.*) Now that makes a-a-all the difference. Thank you.

CRAWFORD: Who won the golf?

CROFTS: Oh, it's really impossible to play properly in this light. (*Pause.*) As a matter of fact he did: only one up though, and that was due to a stymie.

CRAWFORD: You usually beat him in the day-time, don't you?

CROFTS: Ooooh, yes. Nine times out of ten. He's just delighted with himself now; going round the clock alone. (*Seriously.*) Do you know that young fellow sometimes annoys me. What do you think he said just now?

CRAWFORD: I don't know. What?

CROFTS: He said I wasn't a sportsman!

CRAWFORD: He didn't! Whatever for?

CROFTS: Nothing; nothing at all. Simply because I made some remark about the light at the end of the game. It was pure bad temper on his part; nothing else.

CRAWFORD: I'm afraid our generation is not a very respectful one.

CROFTS (*enthusiastically*): Exactly what I'm always saying. Now the Ronga know what respect means. When I was a young man I should never have dreamed of calling a man twice my age no sportsman. I'm not even sure I should even have dreamed of letting him lose.

CRAWFORD: Oh, but you wouldn't like him deliberately to have let you win.

CROFTS: Certainly not! I should have knocked his head off if I'd thought he was doing that. But it's his job to see that I don't think so! However, the fact remains that in these days and in this country respect is an obsolete word.

CRAWFORD: There's one thing about it, though. It's easier for the different generations to mix nowadays.

CROFTS: Who wants them to?

[*She pats his cushion and picks an imaginary thread from his lapel—two powerful arguments.*

Of course, there are exceptions. Some of you young people are less obnoxious than others. (*There is a pause. He continues less at ease.*) I suppose you didn't take Brown's remarks seriously just now?

CRAWFORD: What remarks?

CROFTS: About the tooth-glass. I mean you didn't think I was browbeating you, eh?

CRAWFORD: Of course I didn't, though you had every reason to.

CROFTS: That's right. You know what we old bachelors are. We get into the habit of complaining, and usually to male servants, too. They always say single life sours you. You get married, my girl.

CRAWFORD: I don't know; you know, I often think there is something rather wonderful about bachelordom.

[*The* JUDGE *stirs in his sleep.*

CROFTS (*delighted*): Oh, you're just saying that to please me.

CRAWFORD: No, honestly. I was thinking of the freedom; of the complete independence.

CROFTS (*gloomily*): Mm. It's very much overrated. Sometimes I'd give half my income not to be free! Man was never meant to be free. Freedom's one of the things he prays for in the morning and at night he thanks God that it's impossible. Man's a sociable animal, and there's no freedom except in isolation. (*He grunts.*) There; there's philosophy for you. You get married. Mind, I don't say we haven't our advantages. For instance, you never find us growing into a specimen like Brown. Still, you get married, that's my advice, a bachelor's advice!

CRAWFORD: Then why has the bachelor never taken his own advice?

CROFTS (*confidentially*): He tried to—once. I suppose you can't believe a dried-up old bear like me ever had a love-affair?

CRAWFORD: Can't I! Do tell me about it.

CROFTS: Oh, it's all very dull and very ancient history—nearly thirty years ago. She must be nearly fifty now! I often wonder what she looks like.

CRAWFORD: What did she look like?

CROFTS: Like Lily Langtree—only lovelier. Or at least I used to think so. Juanita Seagrove. Seagrove, the banking man, you know. Well, no, you wouldn't know. He must have died before you were born. Anita she used to be called. I only knew her for a month. It was down at Brighton, in the days when Brighton

was a fashionable spot, and they were all staying in the same hotel as I. And—well, we got engaged: that was all.

CRAWFORD: Then what happened?

CROFTS: Then she disappeared. And a few days later I heard she'd married a clerk in her father's bank.

CRAWFORD: You poor dear! What a beast!

CROFTS (*philosophically*): Well, she was very young—only seventeen. And I've got over it—at least I suppose so. Anyway, that was how I came to join the Army. Impulsive young ass, you know: enlisted and went off to India for some border fighting. That was the fashionable thing to do if you were jilted.

CRAWFORD: And did you never hear from her?

CROFTS: Never heard from her or seen her from that day to this. She may be dead.

CRAWFORD: What was the bank clerk like?

CROFTS: Never saw him. Some rubbishing, twopenny-ha'penny little quill-driver. I remember it nearly broke old Seagrove's heart. He knew the chap. Well, that's enough. That's why I never married. That's why I pretend to be a woman-hater. Once bitten, twice shy, eh? I've been telling myself for thirty years that I was well out of it; but I suppose in my most honest moments I know quite well I would like to have married Anita.

CRAWFORD: You poor dear!

CROFTS: Nonsense, nonsense. Don't you encourage me to be sentimental. This country's a damned sight too sentimental. Now the Ronga are different. I only wanted to say that, if you take my advice, you'll get married. (*Confidentially.*) Tell me, have you anyone in mind, eh?

[*She shakes her head.* HONEY *strolls in unobserved.*

Nobody?

[*She shakes her head again.*

HONEY: Then why not old Crofts? A highly eligible party.

CROFTS (*jumping to his feet*): There! Isn't that exactly what we were saying! Exactly! No reverence! No respect! No manners! No taste even! No anything! I'll tell you this, my young friend: you and your type are a sign of the times, a sign of the times, and a very ominous sign. The Englishman of yesterday wouldn't have tolerated you for a week!

HONEY: Possibly. Nor the Ronga of to-day, I dare say. I think it was Richard Sheridan who said, What the Ronga do to-day the English will do yesterday.

CROFTS: Yes, flippant gibberish is just about your level.

[*He takes post by the window, tapping the ground with his foot.* HONEY *strolls to the* JUDGE'S *chair for the evening paper. The grip seems to have relaxed, for he has no difficulty, a fact that makes* CROFTS *gape with fury.*

Of—of—all—the—— (*But words fail him.*)

[*A smile flickers round the* JUDGE'S *mouth.*

HONEY (*perusing the headlines*): I dreamed about you last night, Crawford.

CRAWFORD (*she is tidying the flowers*): Did you? I hope it was a pleasant dream.

HONEY: It was a very terrifying dream. You were in danger of your life. (*He reads a line or two.*) And I saved you.

CRAWFORD: That was very noble.

HONEY: It was worse than that. It was immoral. A knight-errant is most properly called errant. He is a very wicked man. He has the choice of saving a woman or saving trouble. And he chooses wrong. (*He reads a little further.*) It was raining.

CRAWFORD: When?

HONEY: In my dream. You were lying in Harrington Lane.

CRAWFORD: All in the wet? How beastly for me!

HONEY: The hedges were lined with white, frightened faces. My own lined a bit.

CRAWFORD: What were they frightened about?

HONEY (*reading a line first*): Eh? Frightened because in the distance they saw a great steam-roller plodding its way relentlessly up the lane. We all waited with beating hearts. (*He reads a little more.*) On, on it came. (*Another pause.*)

CRAWFORD (*calmly*): Oh, do be quick. I'm excited.

HONEY: On, on it came. (*Pause.*)

CRAWFORD: Yes, you said that.

HONEY (*putting down the paper*): On, on it came. Now it was barely twenty yards away. A woman screamed.

CRAWFORD: Oh, how lovely!

HONEY: On, on it came. Inch by inch, little by little, bit by bit, precept upon precept.

CRAWFORD: When suddenly a lithe form jumped forward?

HONEY: No, I didn't.

CRAWFORD: Then what did you do?

HONEY: I called out to the engine-driver and asked if he'd mind turning back. And you got up and walked home disgusted.

CRAWFORD: I'm not surprised. Any girl would have done the same.

HONEY: All my dreams have anti-climaxes. I wonder what that means. Can you interpret dreams?

CRAWFORD: I can't, I'm afraid.

BINGHAM (*drily, without opening his eyes*): *I* can—I'm afraid.

[*They all three turn to him in surprise.*

But I won't.

HONEY: Well, of all the mean, deceitful, hypocritical tricks. . . . (*Turning to* CROFTS, *on whom the truth is slowly dawning.*) Do you realise the Judge has been eavesdropping? He heard you propose to Crawford and everything.

CROFTS: I did not propose to Crawford.

[CRAWFORD, *though silent, is as perturbed as either of them.*

HONEY: Well, anyway, he heard everything you were saying before I came in—which was probably not intended for him.

CROFTS (*to* BINGHAM): How dare you, sir!

BINGHAM: How dare I what?

CROFTS: How dare you listen to my conversation?

BINGHAM: I don't admit to having done so. But this is a public room?

HONEY: You were only pretending to be asleep. You know it. (*By now he is amused rather than annoyed.*)

BINGHAM: And what evidence have you for that?

HONEY: Why, you butted into our conversation. Can you do that in your sleep?

BINGHAM: Damn it, I must wake up some time. Perhaps you don't see the necessity, but that's not the point. Crofts, don't let the young jackanapes pull your leg.

CROFTS: Have I your assurance you were asleep?

BINGHAM: Certainly, certainly.

CROFTS: I'm much obliged. Not, of course, that I said anything that you mightn't hear, but . . .

BINGHAM: No, naturally; but it's an unpleasant suspicion, eh?

CROFTS: Exactly.

HONEY: Hodges back yet?

BINGHAM: I don't know. I've been asleep.

[BROWN *returns with an* ADDLESHAW *washed and brushed.*

BROWN: This is Mr. Addleshaw: Mr. Honey, Sir Arthur Bingham . . .

[*He is interrupted by the sound of broken glass, for* CRAWFORD *has knocked a vase of flowers off the table she was standing by.* ADDLESHAW *views her with astonishment, which gradually gives place to faint amusement.* HONEY *helps her to retrieve the fragments.*

CRAWFORD (*trembling and confused*): Oh, don't bother, please. I . . . It was stupid of me. I'll . . . go and fetch a cloth. (*She disappears.*)

BROWN: And that's Miss Crawford, our private secretary.

ADDLESHAW: Oh, yes. (*To the* JUDGE.) How do you do, sir Pleased to meet you.

BINGHAM: How do you do. I must have been asleep when you arrived. I'm afraid you'll find we all have some peculiar habits. We're an assembly perhaps of peculiar men.

[BROWN *is startled.*

ADDLESHAW: I don't doubt I have my share.

[HODGES *comes in through the window.*

Hallo, Hodges! Where on earth had you got to?

HODGES: Oh, you've arrived, have you? I went to Harrington Lane to meet you, but must have got there too late. Your telegram has only just arrived.

ADDLESHAW (*twinkling*): I don't believe you expected me.

HODGES: Of course I expected you. What do you mean?

ADDLESHAW: Then Brown has been pulling my leg!

BROWN (*disgusted*): He did *not* expect you. He's lying. He wrote to put you off. He said so.

HODGES (*lightly*): Brown has already betrayed me, has he? Yes, it's quite true. Sit down, I'll explain to you later. Have you seen your room?

ADDLESHAW: Yes, thanks. Brown acted host. Very comfortable, too. You seem to have made a very charming place out here; though why in the wilds of the country beats me.

HODGES: If I want racket, I can get it in town. This is a arle holiday. It doesn't matter what we do, when we do it, or how we do it.

BROWN: And, as you see, they can indulge their taste for fancy dress!

HODGES (*laughing*): We've tried continuously to induce Brown to be comfortable, but he won't abandon his starch and broadcloth for anyone. I believe he has his bath in 'em.

BROWN: I can be quite as comfortable, thanks, in a black coat as in a red one. Nor am I yet driven to economise in socks.

CROFTS: If you had known what a little hardship was, you'd appreciate comfort when you get the chance of it. Naturally, people who've never put their noses beyond Metroland can scarcely expect to . . .

BROWN: Swaggering among the Ronga is not the only form of hardship. When I was a young man . . .

ADDLESHAW: Tell me, Hodges, have you enjoyed the brotherly love and unruffled good-fellowship and peace and quiet that you expected?

[*Everyone is pulled up short.*

BINGHAM: Throughout the whole three weeks not a single cross word has been exchanged. What do you think of that?

[BROWN, *when power of movement returns, goes and mixes himself a strong drink.*

ADDLESHAW: A great deal.

HODGES: You're a bad prophet, I'm afraid.

ADDLESHAW (*his eyes twinkling*): Oh, am I? You forget something. (*He grins intently at* HODGES.) You and your womanless holiday! (*He laughs heartily, and digs* HODGES *in the ribs.*)

HODGES (*nettled*): Don't do that, I implore you! It's your very worst habit. It's annoying as well as vulgar.

HONEY: You must expect the true woman-hater to be sensitive about his ribs.

ADDLESHAW: The true woman-hater! (*He shakes a forefinger and laughs boisterously.*)

HODGES: I suppose all this heartiness means that you've seen Crawford?

ADDLESHAW: *I* have. *I* understand now why I wasn't intended to arrive! (*Another paroxysm.*)

HODGES: You don't seem to understand one thing though. I put you off for your own sake. These gentlemen don't even know

that you know her. That's why I went to Harrington Lane to intercept you.

ADDLESHAW: But why such a secret? (*To the others.*) The young lady worked in my office for two years.

[*Except the* JUDGE *and* HODGES, *everyone is startled.*

BROWN: Then . . . Then you are the man with the beard?

CROFTS: And the glass eye?

ADDLESHAW (*good-naturedly*): I have that misfortune, yes.

CROFTS: Well, I'm damned!

ADDLESHAW: I seem to have caused a sensation. May I be let into the secret?

HODGES: Yes. Crawford came to us about three weeks ago and said she had committed theft . . .

BROWN: By mistake, you understand—so to speak.

HODGES: She described the details, including her employer, and didn't know—and still doesn't know—that I was a sleeping partner. Well, to cut a long story short, some of us wanted to give her another chance, so I sent the money back to you, as you know.

ADDLESHAW: With orders to let the matter drop. And kept her here ever since! (*He roars with laughter.*) Oh, you woman-haters!

HODGES: Addleshaw, you're displaying extraordinarily bad taste.

BROWN: And she told us a thing or two about you, my friend.

ADDLESHAW: Oh, did she? Well, let's have it.

CROFTS: The man has no shame whatever!

ADDLESHAW: Shame? Why should I have shame? Now if I were a woman-hater like Hodges and had done what he has done I *might* be ashamed. But I don't pretend to dislike women. I don't believe in pretending. I like 'em very much. Perhaps I like 'em too much. I'm what you fellows would call, I suppose, a complete libertine. I'm human; I'm animal; I'm sensual. I admit it. I glory in it. It's my creed.

BROWN: I will not sit still and listen to talk like this! Ever since I first arrived, not a day has passed without *someone* thinking he was expected to say something immoral. This place is not fit for a decent, church-going citizen to live in. Addleshaw starts bragging that he's the kind of man no self-respecting woman ought to meet; then says it's his creed! Everyone here makes their vices into a creed. If Addleshaw wants to make a beast of himself, let him. Let him, I say. I'm no prude. But why not keep it to himself? A man may be as vicious and rotten as he likes as far as I'm concerned. *I* shan't stop him. But viciousness *on principle* is what I will not stand. *Now*, Hodges! If Annie knew that I was living among liars and libertines and thieves and poets I don't know what she'd say.

CROFTS: You seem scarcely to realise, sir, that this creed of yours nearly sent an unfortunate girl to prison.

ADDLESHAW: I don't understand.

HODGES: He means that you were one of the reasons why Crawford decamped.

ADDLESHAW: I? Upon my soul, I don't know what you're driving at.

HODGES: Strain your memory a little.

HONEY: Inexplicable as it may seem, your attentions eventually became odious.

ADDLESHAW (*amazed*): My attentions!

BROWN: Bluff! Bluff!

ADDLESHAW: There's no bluff about it. Will somebody be good enough to tell me exactly what Crawford, as you call her, has been saying?

[*There is a pause, for no one is inclined to*

BROWN (*with less assurance*): Bluff! Bluff!

ADDLESHAW: Well, I'm ready?

HODGES: There seems no necessity to spell it, I should have thought. The long and short of it is simply that Crawford alleges

you have been molesting her, that you attempted to make her necessity your opportunity, if you like.

ADDLESHAW: So she stole that cash to escape from me?

HODGES: Partly, yes.

ADDLESHAW: I see. Then Crawford is a liar on a very magnificent scale, that's all.

BROWN: And in view of your vaunted "creed," do you expect us to believe that?

ADDLESHAW: You can believe it or not, as you like. But I'll just give you my version. Miss Crawford applied for her job two years ago when business was slack. She couldn't type, and had only just begun to teach herself shorthand. She had no qualifications whatever except a good general education, an air of capability, a pretty face and a capacity to arouse sympathy. I took her for the last two reasons. I'm quite frank with you. I don't like frumps. The work was more or less personal, not of very great importance, and Crawford attracted me. Now you know why she got her job. She learned quickly and soon became a business asset as well as a decoration. I've missed her in both capacities since she left. As to the "molestation," from the very first day she arrived, she offered me every encouragement . . .

BROWN: Nonsense. I don't believe it.

ADDLESHAW: Hear me out, please. I repeat, every encouragement. But during the whole two years I consistently turned my glass eye to them.

[BROWN *snorts sceptically.*

You don't believe it? Well, I can't convince you, I know, but just ask Hodges whether I'm a good business man or not.

HODGES: I know very little about the business, but certainly your reputation is good enough.

ADDLESHAW: And in your opinion?

HODGES: Extremely good.

ADDLESHAW: Thank you. Well, I don't mind laying down the rule that a good business man at the head of a big staff doesn't

start intrigues with his typists except in novels, even if he's as naturally "vicious" as I am. He keeps his peccadillos outside the office. I should have thought you would have known that, Brown.

[BROWN *shrugs.*

I admired Miss Crawford, I admit, and if she had not been my secretary I don't pretend we should have stopped short at admiration. But we *did* stop short; and if you want to know, it wasn't *her* fault that we did! The reason was simply and solely business; nothing else. That's all I have to say.

[*He looks round at the faces.* HONEY *looks worried,* CROFTS *angry,* BINGHAM *serene,* BROWN *flushed,* HODGES *has a hard smile.*

BROWN: And this is all *I* have to say. I consider you have made a cruel, cowardly and unnecessary attack upon a lonely, unbefriended and defenceless girl to save your own face, which, in my considered opinion, is not worth saving, and I don't believe a word of it.

CROFTS: Nor do I.

ADDLESHAW: Brown, there are many men who would take offence.

BROWN: Then take offence! If you'd been living here for three weeks you would be used to plain speaking.

ADDLESHAW: Oho! (*He chuckles.*) Again authorities differ. Sir Arthur had a different story. (*Everyone is still glum.*) Oh, come, come! The world is full of men and women: in other words, the world is full of liars. If you let it depress you whenever you discover one, then God help you. Life's too short. That's common sense.

HODGES: You're excellent company, Addleshaw, but there are times when your common sense jars. Either you or Crawford has made fools of us. It's not the lies that worry us, but our having believed them.

HONEY: I don't accept that conclusion. I can believe both of them. The whole thing is probably a mere misunderstanding. What actually happened, I imagine, is this. Crawford was con-

scious of Addleshaw's admiration. She disliked it; perhaps it frightened her even . . .

[ADDLESHAW *shakes his head and smiles.*

but she couldn't show it for fear of losing her job. For the same reason she may even have made herself unnecessarily agreeable. Mind, she never actually *said* Addleshaw molested her.

HODGES: No, but she gave us very clearly to understand it.

HONEY: We were very ready to understand it. Anyway, that's my reading of the two versions.

CROFTS: And a very sensible one, too.

BROWN: I for one am prepared to accept it.

HONEY: And you, Judge?

BINGHAM: No, I prefer Addleshaw's version.

BROWN: Oh, do you!

BINGHAM: I find it all extremely interesting. I have long suspected as much. Of course, as Hodges must have guessed from our conversation this evening, I have realised for some time that Crawford was an employee in his own firm . . .

[HODGES *nods.*

BROWN: It's all very well to be wise after the event.

BINGHAM: It was not difficult. What did you imagine he did with the money? How else did you imagine he could prevent the employer prosecuting? Wasn't it obviously on Addleshaw's account that he felt obliged to keep us in the dark? But this is beside the point.

CROFTS: Entirely. The point is that Addleshaw's story is totally inconsistent with what we know of Crawford's character.

BINGHAM: Not with what *I* know of it. Crawford's system is simplicity itself. She is all things to all men, herself to no one. She makes up her mind what everyone wants and then supplies it. A mother to Brown, a sister to Honey, a daughter to Crofts, a siren to Addleshaw, and . . . and something else to Hodges.

She makes few mistakes. At one time she thought I needed a great-granddaughter, but the mistake was soon remedied. *Of course*, Addleshaw is speaking the truth.

HONEY (*distressed*): My dear Judge, all this is pure imagination.

BINGHAM: Well, here's something that is not. When she first arrived, Crofts objected to helping her on the grounds that there was no excuse for a well-brought-up girl. About then she remembered she was not well brought up, that she had never known a "mother's love," that her father was a monster who used to beat her. Well, I happen to know through Charlie Campbell that that father was a mild little country parson, who adored her.

CROFTS: How do you know?

BINGHAM: Campbell told me all about them. The mother, who died in childbirth, was Campbell's sister and the black sheep of the family—divorced twice—once by me—and Lord knows what else. That's why this girl has never actually met her uncle, though at one time he offered to adopt her.

HONEY: And the father refused?

BINGHAM: Yes, he couldn't bear to be parted from her, this child-beating monster of a father, although he had scarcely enough money to live on himself. Pity he *didn't* beat her a bit! Anyway, *now* do you believe Addleshaw?

[HODGES *laughs.* CROFTS *rumbles something inaudible.* HONEY *bites his lip. A pause.*

BROWN (*snappily*): No, I don't! I . . . I am immensely distressed. I have had an extremely unpleasant evening, for which I shall accept no apology. I . . . I . . . I shall go to bed.

[*He goes out. There is a silence.*

HONEY (*trying with trembling fingers to light a pipe*): Come for a stroll, Hodges.

HODGES: Now?

HONEY (*nods*): I want to talk to you.

HODGES: Come along then. You won't mind my leaving you, Addleshaw? No ceremony here, you know.

[*They go out through the window.*

ADDLESHAW: That's all right.

[*He strolls aimlessly about, and finally takes post out on the terrace, gazing into the night.*

BINGHAM: Mm. Well, I'm for bed, too. (*He notices* CROFTS, *who is scarlet and is evincing other signals of suppressed emotion.*) My dear Crofts, what is the matter?

CROFTS (*abandoning restraint*): There's a great deal the matter! If what you say is true, that woman ought to be whipped through the streets.

BINGHAM (*soothingly*): Nonsense, nonsense! Why let a trifle disturb you? It's getting late. Come along to bed.

CROFTS: But I don't regard it as a trifle. This kind of thing has happened to me before . . . thirty years ago. If it weren't for that, I shouldn't be a lonely old bachelor now. Do you call that a trifle?

BINGHAM: No, a blessing. I wouldn't change my bachelordom for a sultan's harem. Besides, you weren't going to marry Crawford?

CROFTS: I know that, but . . . but . . .

BINGHAM: But you had faith in her? A profound mistake. If you don't put Woman on a pedestal you won't get disappointments. Come along to bed.

CROFTS: Well, the mistake shall not occur again. As for Crawford, I . . . I shall never speak to her again. That is, if what you say is true.

[CRAWFORD *comes in with a cloth to wipe up the flower-water, and he stares grimly at her. She returns his gaze with an affectionate smile. Its warmth melts his resolution. He takes an indeterminate step or two, then turns defiantly to the* JUDGE.

CROFTS: But it's *not* true! (*He takes her hand and pats it.*) Next time you're in trouble, my dear, you come to me, to an old fool who can't learn a lesson.

CRAWFORD (*surprised, but responsive with grip and look—indeed she smoothes his lapel tenderly*): You—know I will.

CROFTS (*refreshed, his mind again at peace*): That's it. Well, now. Come along to bed, Judge. Good night, my dear.

BINGHAM: Good night, Crawford. (*He follows* CROFTS *to bed, chuckling, chuckling.*)

CRAWFORD: Good night.

[*She gazes after them awhile, then goes on her knees to wipe up the flower debris.* ADDLESHAW *strolls in from the verandah and contemplates her with undisguised amusement. She controls herself and returns him a conciliatory smile.*

ADDLESHAW (*half to himself*): "Crawford"! (*He lounges against an occasional table near her, smoking and watching her. After a while he says mock-politely.*) How-do-you-do? You don't mind saying "How do you do?" to me now?

CRAWFORD: You gave me such a shock when you came in. I stood on the stairs for ages quaking, before I dared come back.

ADDLESHAW (*after a pause*): Country air agrees with you. You're looking prettier than ever.

CRAWFORD (*nervously*): Oh, everyone is so kind.

ADDLESHAW: It was a kind Providence that plumped you down among five such particularly thoroughgoing fools.

CRAWFORD (*with a flash of hostility*): Fools, are they? They're the five best men in the world.

ADDLESHAW: You must have found them very easy prey. (*She doesn't answer.*) What made you come to my partner?

CRAWFORD: I didn't know he was your partner. It was a pure coincidence. It only dawned on me after I'd been here a week, through something he said one day.

ADDLESHAW: Lovely flowers!

CRAWFORD: These orchids? They are my favourites. They're the last there are in the garden.

ADDLESHAW: I hear you've been taking away my reputation; telling them what a wicked man I am.

CRAWFORD: That was before I knew they knew you. Do you think you can forgive me?

ADDLESHAW: Oh, don't apologise. I'm not particular about my reputation.

CRAWFORD (*with a sudden fear*): What did *you* say to *them*?

[*His grin broadens tantalizingly.*

ADDLESHAW: No, you needn't be alarmed. I confirmed your description of me. Brown is quite convinced that I am the most vicious man in Europe—a view that my poor wife would have corroborated.

[*She is examining her hand.*

What's the matter?

CRAWFORD: Oh, nothing. A little splinter of glass, I think.

ADDLESHAW: Show me.

CRAWFORD: No, it's nothing. (*But he takes her hand and searches it.*)

ADDLESHAW: It's grown rougher?

CRAWFORD: I've been doing housework.

ADDLESHAW: No! (*Then he laughs.*) What brutes these woman-haters are! (*softly*) If you had fallen into *my* hands, I shouldn't have made you do housework.

[*Frightened, she tries to withdraw her hand, but he holds it fast.*

CRAWFORD: I . . . I'm sure the glass is out now, thank you.

ADDLESHAW: I don't think it is.

[*There is a pause.*

CRAWFORD: Please, let me go.

ADDLESHAW: Oh, come now. Why so forbidding? (*He puts his other hand on her far shoulder and she looks round helplessly in fear.*) You said I molested you.

CRAWFORD: Yes, I know. I'm sorry. I've said I'm sorry. I . . . I'm sorry.

ADDLESHAW: But I'm not. You can't expect me to sustain the penalties of a bad reputation without enjoying its advantages. Just now I'm enjoying its advantages.

CRAWFORD: Oh, do let me go! Please.

[*He pulls her to him, and in spite of her struggles kisses her roughly.* HODGES *appears at the window, and, when he realises the situation, darts forward, his eyes blazing. He checks himself as they fall apart.*

HODGES: What the devil are you doing, Addleshaw?

ADDLESHAW (*good-humouredly*): What a very indiscreet question!

HODGES: You—you were bullying my—secretary!

ADDLESHAW (*coolly*): I was kissing your secretary. I never imagined you were so jealous of her.

HODGES (*furious*): Are you implying that I treat her in the same way?

ADDLESHAW: Of course I am.

HODGES: Did she tell you so?

CRAWFORD (*fiercely*): No!

HODGES: I asked Mr. Addleshaw.

ADDLESHAW: Come now, are we going to start quarrelling about a thing like this? There seems to be a quarrelsome atmosphere in this house. You find me kissing this girl and, for some reason which is not my business, you object to it. Very well then. It shall stop. Why not leave it at that? You may be only a sleeping partner, but the firm of Hodges and Addleshaw won't profit by our quarrelling.

HODGES: "For some reason I object"! What reason do you think, man? You were bullying the girl, that's the reason! And I object, whoever you are and . . . and whatever I may think of the woman.

ADDLESHAW: Don't talk about bullying. It shows ignorance in female psychology, which is your own subject too. Crawford was thoroughly enjoying herself.

CRAWFORD'S *fingers quiver, and she seems to be choking.*

HODGES (*looking at her distastefully*): That may be as it may be, but while you're in my house you'll be good enough to . . . Oh, God, this is getting like Lyceum melodrama! What a fantastic situation to be in! We ought to be in bed.

ADDLESHAW (*with a deep breath*): I shall take a breath of air first. (*Mocking.*) Good night, Crawford. (*They go out, one through the door, the other through the windows. As soon as they are gone* CRAWFORD *breaks down.* ADDLESHAW, *strolling past the window a moment or two later, sees her and stops, amazed. He comes back and, after standing by her unnoticed for some while, touches her lightly on the shoulder. She looks up and, still sobbing, recoils at the sight of him.*) It's all right, my dear; I shan't harm you. (*Reassured, she ignores him and gives herself up again to tears. He plucks his beard uncomfortably.*) Tell me, did I hurt you just now . . . physically? Tell me. (*She shakes her head.*) I thought you were coquetting. (*She dries her eyes a little but, still sniffing miserably, keeps them away from him.*) "Bullying," Hodges called it. I hope it wasn't. Was it? (*She nods. He pauses.*) God, I'm . . . I'm very ashamed. I suppose you won't believe it, but I've never—never done that before. (*She makes no sign.*) I'm afraid I don't understand. You wouldn't have minded at the office. Or so I always imagined. Frankly, *there* you—well, you asked for it.

CRAWFORD (*looking in front of her and still hiccoughing*): I was afraid of losing my job.

ADDLESHAW: I see. Well, that was why I . . . er . . . blundered. Do you think you can accept my apology? (*She nods.*) Will

you shake hands? (*She gives him her left hand, though not apparently her attention.*) Is that the only reason why you've changed? (*Sniff.*)

CRAWFORD (*more to herself than to him*): No . . . I think I'm in love . . . with . . . one of them.

[*There is a long silence.* ADDLESHAW *whistles three soft notes.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III

Three weeks later. The scene is the same save that it is flooded with sunlight. Only BROWN *is present, seated in his customary place on the circular settle. He has some obvious difficulty in controlling his impatience. At length* CROFTS *looks in from the terrace—to which* BROWN'S *back is turned.* CROFTS *looks round the room, affecting not to have noticed* BROWN.

CROFTS (*as though to himself*): Mm. No one here.

[*He goes out.* BROWN *bridles. A short while after* TRENT *comes in.*

BROWN (*without looking round*): Get out!

TRENT: Beg pardon, sir?

BROWN: Oh, I'm extremely sorry. I thought you were Mr. Crofts.

TRENT: Not at all, sir. Tea is served on the lawn, sir.

BROWN: Tea, tea? No, thank you. I can't now, I'm afraid. I'm busy.

TRENT (*with some scepticism*): Yes, sir. (*He prepares to go.*)

BROWN: Oh, Trent, I haven't been asleep as far as you know, have I?

TRENT: I couldn't say, sir.

BROWN: I mean, you haven't heard the telephone ring, for instance?

TRENT: No, sir.

BROWN (*with unexpected emphasis*): Thank God!

[TRENT *again attempts to leave.*

Oh, Trent, do you know what the time is?

TRENT (*consulting his watch*): Twenty after four, sir.

BROWN (*to himself*): Shouldn't be long, shouldn't be long. (*The telephone rings. To* TRENT, *whose hand is already on the receiver.*) Don't touch it! (TRENT *recoils in alarm, and* BROWN *advances to the instrument with studied composure.*) Hallo . . . hallo . . .

hallo . . . Ye-es . . . Ye-e-es . . . What's that? No . . . Seven nine four or seven five four? . . . Seven *five* four? Certainly not. . . . Sorry I've been troubled, indeed! Who are *you* to be sorry? I've a good mind to report you to the supervisor. . . . I don't care if you *are* the supervisor. I . . . Hallo, hallo, hallo! (*A little shamefacedly he puts down the receiver.*)

TRENT: Will that be all, sir?

BROWN: Yes, thank you.

[*He returns to his seat and to his vigil.* TRENT *goes out. Presently* CROFTS *comes back.*

CROFTS (*grunting, with bad grace*): Hallo.

BROWN (*with worse*): Hallo.

[CROFTS *wanders aimlessly for a while, then, taking a putter from a corner and dropping a ball from his pocket, begins, much to* BROWN'S *irritation, to take some practice. Eventually the ball rolls under the latter's seat.* BROWN, *ostentatiously ignoring the fact, starts to whistle airily, tunelessly.*

CROFTS (*now thoroughly at a loose end*): Busy?

BROWN (*when he has finished the air*): Very. (*He takes it up again.*)

CROFTS (*gruffly*): Wouldn't like to learn clock-golf?

BROWN (*again taking his own time*): I thank you, no. (*He is jerked, however, out of his complacency by the sound of* CROFTS *sinking into a chair, and asks with eager apprehension:*) Are you going to sit down there?

CROFTS: I *am* sitting down here.

[BROWN *paces the room in perturbation.*

BROWN: Tea is served on the lawn.

CROFTS: I've just finished lunch.

[BROWN *does some more hard thinking.*

BROWN: Crawford will give you a game.

CROFTS: She doesn't play.

BROWN: She does. She was playing with Honey yesterday.

CROFTS: You seem very anxious to be alone.

BROWN: I'm expecting a trunk call. From my wife.

CROFTS: Where is Crawford, then?

BROWN: Where is she? Over in the cow-shed, I think. Or the pigsties.

CROFTS (*grumbling*): She's always at the pigsties. She seems to prefer them to the house.

[*He goes out.* BROWN *resettles himself, and re-reads a letter with animation. The telephone rings. He braces himself and walks with dignity to the instrument.*

BROWN (*stiffly*): Hallo. . . . Ye-es. . . . Seven nine four. . . . Ye-es. . . . Trunks. . . . Ye-es. . . . (*There is a pause. Then gradually his features dissolve into a smile of blissful fatuity. Speaking low, almost coyly.*) Is that Annie? . . . Well, er . . . (*A little at a loss.*) How are you? . . . That's good. And the girls? . . . Fine. You got my letter? . . . And I got yours. . . . Yes, mine was a little short, I know. . . . (*Bursting out.*) Oh, but, Annie, I've got such lots to say, too much for a letter. Annie, it's hell here. At least, sometimes. Sometimes I'm very happy. But there's nothing to do in the evenings. Nor—nor in the daytime for that matter. And the men are so peculiar. All their ideas are topsy-turvy. One of them's a poet. I never have liked poets, have I? . . . Eh? . . . No, exactly. And there's an old man, a judge, I wrote you about him. He's supposed to be brilliant, but I think he's half mad. Then there's that fellow I quarrel with all day. . . . What? . . . Enjoy it? I certainly do not. . . . Crofts his name. I wrote you about him. But let's talk about something pleasant. . . . What's that? . . . Oh, Crawford. You must meet him . . . her, I mean. That's one of Hodges' fads. We have to pretend she's a man. . . . Oh yes, they're all cranks, I tell you, all cranks! Anyway, she's an extraordinary young woman. I should like her to be friends with Olivia. . . . I don't mind if she did nearly go to prison. . . . What? . . . Yes, I know. That's what living in this ungodly household's done for me. . . . I say, I've been talking to Crawford about this coffee-bean business.

. . . (*A little piqued.*) It's nothing to laugh at. . . . Anyway, she's persuaded me that I was wrong. . . . Oh, no. . . . (*Coyly.*) It's very sweet of you to say so, my dear. . . . (*Blissfully.*) Very sweet . . . very sweet. . . . I say, I do want to see you again. . . . Yes . . . and the children. I've made up my mind to leave here somehow. . . . As soon as possible. In a day or two. . . . I say, how do the new chintzes look? What? . . . Did you say something's happened to Olivia? Guess, I can't guess. . . . (*Amazed.*) No. . . . No. . . . I don't believe it. . . . Who to? . . . Pennycuick? That very nice young fellow? . . . Well, I . . . When did it happen? When did you hear? Is she happy? Fancy her before all the others! Last to come, first to go! But, I say, when did you hear? . . . Hallo, hallo! . . . Hallo, hallo, hallo, hallo, hallo! (*He bangs the instrument.*) Miss, hallo! Hallo, Miss! Miss, Miss, Miss, Miss! You've cut me off! . . . Yes, it is! . . . A matter of life and death! Oh, get me that number again, please, at once. Yes, the Surbiton call. . . . At once!

[*He hangs up the receiver and sits in silent mental exhaustion. At length he is grinning from pure happiness, and finally is unable to stop himself executing a heavy-footed* pas seul. *In the middle of it* HONEY *and* CRAWFORD *appear on the verandah, arm-in-arm, and watch him in amazement. When aware of them, he is intensely embarrassed.*

HONEY: "Why hop ye so, ye high hills?"

BROWN (*in gruff confusion*): Where have you been?

CRAWFORD: For a walk—seven miles.

BROWN (*after a few uneasy turns*): Had tea?

HONEY: No.

BROWN: It is served on the lawn.

[*Repeating the phrase and very distrait, he makes an inconsequent escape.* CRAWFORD *is dressed in a white silk shirt-blouse with short sleeves and open neck, and an old tweed skirt with a large rectangular rent at the knee. They are both hot and dusty.*

HONEY: What's the matter with Brown?

CRAWFORD: I think he's in love.

HONEY: That's a novel cause for amusement. With you?

CRAWFORD: Don't be silly. (*Straddling.*) I'm a man. It's his wife. I told him to ring her up to-day. Got a cigarette? (*He gives her one.*) How my feet ache!

HONEY (*not quite at ease*): Er . . . I meant to say something while we were out this afternoon.

CRAWFORD (*fencing him off*): Well, you did, didn't you? Lots of things.

HONEY: Everything except what I meant to.

CRAWFORD (*examining the rent*): Honey, young-fellow-my-lad, you owe me a new skirt.

HONEY: Nonsense; I didn't tear it.

CRAWFORD: No, but you insisted on my climbing that hedge. I must go and change. It's not decent.

HONEY: That doesn't matter. You're among men. Besides, I have something to say to you.

CRAWFORD: Well, I must change first. There's a draught. A skirt doesn't last me a week with this farm-work.

HONEY: Are you sure the farm isn't too much for you?

CRAWFORD: Lord, no. I love it. Why, even father's little farm was bigger than this, and I used to manage that singlehanded. I should hate not to have anything to do. (*Jumping up.*) I've a brilliant idea! There's a pair of breeches in my trunk that I used to wear on father's farm. I'd quite forgotten about them. They're old and worn and comfortable and adorable. In the future I'll climb through as many hedges as you like. The last vestige of my sex shall disappear.

HONEY (*sceptically*): Oh! (*Stopping her at the door.*) No, that can wait. (*Depositing her by the scruff of the neck in a chair.*) Listen to me. (*Self-consciously.*) I . . . er . . . I am a man totally devoid of sentiment or romance.

CRAWFORD (*ironically*): Totally.

HONEY: And I have been thinking that . . . on strictly practical, material grounds, you understand . . . (CRAWFORD *nods.*) that . . . er . . . as one man to another, so to speak . . . (*Much to* CRAWFORD'S *relief,* TRENT *comes in with a parcel and some letters.* HONEY *is annoyed.*) Anything for me, Trent?

TRENT: No, sir. (*He goes out.*)

CRAWFORD: Who's the parcel for?

HONEY: For you.

CRAWFORD (*undoing it*): Whoever from?

HONEY: Well, as I was saying . . .

CRAWFORD: Orchids! How lovely!

HONEY (*disturbed*): Orchids! Who sent them?

CRAWFORD (*reading the card*): Good heavens. Addleshaw!

HONEY: Addleshaw! Addleshaw! But why, why?

CRAWFORD: Because there are no more in the garden, and he knows they're my favourite flower.

HONEY (*earnestly*): Crawford, you—know quite well what I mean.

[*She is silent for a while.*

CRAWFORD (*making room for him on the arm of her chair*): I'll tell you all about it. (*Her eyes are fixed on the orchids in her lap.*) You see, when I was in his office he thought I was . . . well, loose. I suppose I made myself too agreeable.

HONEY (*sympathetically*): Why did you?

CRAWFORD: I don't know. Partly because I knew he admired me, and a woman can't help responding a little. Partly because I didn't want to lose my job. Partly because I knew nobody, because I was generally depressed after my father's death, and one thing and another, and I didn't much mind what happened to me.

HONEY (*with difficulty*): But nothing . . . nothing did happen to you?

[*She shakes her head. He rests his hand almost paternally on her shoulder.*

CRAWFORD: Anyhow, when he came down here, you know what he thought I was. And one night he . . . well, he tried to . . . (*His grip tightens on her shoulder.*) Oh, you're hurting me!

HONEY (*very low*): I'm sorry, dear.

CRAWFORD: And—and Hodges interrupted. And then when Mr. Addleshaw realised he had made a mistake—though it was really my fault—he was a dear. He was honestly upset about it. And . . . well, now he's just sent me these flowers. And . . . that's all.

[*He bends and kisses her hair.*

CRAWFORD (*trying to laugh, but with tears in her eyes*): Oh, don't be sentimental, Honey dear!

HONEY (*a rather limp shadow of his normal buoyant self*): Sentimental! I?

CRAWFORD: You hurt me.

HONEY: What do you mean?

CRAWFORD: You're such a darling. . . . You all are . . that it makes me feel ashamed. I don't deserve any of it. You're so childish and helpless. You'd believe in anything or anyone, even me. I'm a little beast, Honey, really.

HONEY: Well, I like little beasts. I think it was the Dean of St. Paul's who said . . .

[BROWN *comes in.*

Damn.

BROWN: Has the telephone gone?

HONEY: Not a step.

BROWN: Letters! For me? Yes; from Annie. Two. What's this! Crawford! Look here!

CRAWFORD: What's the matter?

BROWN: Here's a letter for Crofts!

CRAWFORD: Well, why not?

BROWN: Why not? Why not? Are you mad? It's from Annie!

CRAWFORD: Rubbish. You must have made a mistake.

BROWN: Don't I know my own wife's handwriting? Compare them yourself. She's written us one each! One each! One each!! One each!!!

CRAWFORD: Well, perhaps they're friends.

BROWN: That's exactly the point, you ass! Where is he? Where is he? I shall insult him! He must be found at once, insulted without delay!

[*She tries to interpose.*

No, I will not be calmed down! I know where he is! He's with the cows! One each! One each! One each! (*He bounces furiously away through the windows.*)

CRAWFORD: Do you think I ought to go after him?

HONEY: No, they'll enjoy themselves thoroughly. Listen to me. I was just going to say something when he bounced in. I want you to understand . . .

CRAWFORD (*warningly*): As one man to another?

HONEY: Yes, as one man to another: that . . . You know, that fool has utterly spoilt the atmosphere.

CRAWFORD: I think he's made it fresh and wholesome again. Let's have tea.

HONEY: I'm not hungry. Tell me, why did you tell me . . . all you did?

CRAWFORD: Why? Because I like you and trust you, my dear, I think, more than anyone in the world. As one man to another.

HONEY: I'm tired of that phrase. It's ridiculous. You're not a man; you don't look like one. . . .

CRAWFORD: Wait till I don my breeches.

HONEY: You don't talk like one or think like one. Your soul's not a man's.

CRAWFORD: I know. It's not big enough.

HONEY: Don't mock me.

CRAWFORD: I mean it.

HONEY: Then the more the irony. Why, a woman's soul is altogether finer fibre; a more delicate, a purer organism. A more . . .

CRAWFORD: Woman-hater!

HONEY: Man-eater! You make me repudiate even my theories.

CRAWFORD: Perhaps that was the real nature of Eve's curse. Don't pay me compliments, old man, they may be double-edged.

HONEY: I must risk that. I've got to pay you the greatest compliment in my power. (*He puts an arm round her shoulders.*) You know what it is, dear. (*Whimsically.*) As one man to another, will you be my wife?

CRAWFORD (*slowly, stroking the hand on her shoulder*): I hoped you wouldn't ask me. I did try to stop you.

HONEY: Why should you try?

CRAWFORD: Because . . . because . . . I can't quite tell. Listen. There's the car. They've come back from golf.

[*He frowns and moves a little apart from her.* HODGES *and* BINGHAM *come in. They deposit their golf-bags in a corner.*

CRAWFORD: Did you play well?

BINGHAM: I did. Hodges played abominably.

CRAWFORD: Who won?

BINGHAM: He did. He gave me a stroke a hole. But I couldn't last the course. You can't play a good round of golf with one foot in the last hole. I think it was Sir Arthur Bingham who said that, Honey.

HONEY: I must remember it.

[BINGHAM *looks from him to* CRAWFORD *and back again, and chuckles with blatant insinuation.* HONEY *glares at him.*

BINGHAM: Tea ready?

HONEY (*savagely*): It is served on the lawn.

[*The* JUDGE *goes out.*

CRAWFORD (*winningly*): I'm sure you didn't play abominably, Hodges?

HODGES (*unresponding*): Are you? (*He takes up a club with a broken shaft and examines the pieces critically. He starts to hum.*)

CRAWFORD (*still amiable*): Yes, of course, that shakes my faith a little. (*No answer.*) I hope that doesn't mean you've been bad-tempered.

HODGES (*with studied inattention*): Do you?

CRAWFORD (*mischievously*): They always say golf's bad for the nerves.

HODGES (*replacing the club-head*): Not only golf.

CRAWFORD: Don't you think you've been playing too much lately?

HODGES: No. (*He follows* BINGHAM, *scowling and humming.*)

HONEY: I consider Hodges is damned uncivil.

CRAWFORD: Poor fellow! I wouldn't have him civil for the world.

HONEY: Why not?

[*She doesn't answer, but roams the room thoughtfully, pausing awhile at the window looking out on to the sunshine, and finally comes to rest in front of him where he stands by the mantelpiece. She twines a finger through his button-hole, gazing on to the floor between them.*

CRAWFORD: For the same reason that I can't . . . marry you.

HONEY: Can't! (*Steadying his voice.*) And what's that?

CRAWFORD: Because . . . I think I'm . . . in love . . . with him.

[HONEY *is too amazed to answer.*

HONEY (*at length breaking the silence*): Whom? You can't mean Hodges? (*She nods. He takes a few paces, trying to make it sink in, then with a great, resigned sigh mutters :*) Well, I'm damned.

CRAWFORD (*coming to him, conscience-struck, genuinely distressed*): Oh, Honey dear, don't look so wretched! What can I do? What should I have done? I would do anything not to hurt you. You

know it, my dear, don't you? Do say you know it. I think I feel much more unhappy about it than you.

[*Touched, smiling wistfully, he takes her hands and draws her on to the seat beside him.*

HONEY: I know it quite well. There. Be a man!

CRAWFORD: Oh, don't! You're an angel.

HONEY: Nonsense. Angels wear night-shirts, I wear pyjamas. Cheer up. You ought to be consoling me, not I you.

CRAWFORD: I know. I can't do anything I ought. You're well out of it. I'm a rotten bargain for anyone. Honey dear, do say you don't mind awfully.

HONEY (*returning faintly to his usual self*): I don't. In fact, I have a sneaking feeling that I'm really—in my heart of hearts—quite relieved!

CRAWFORD (*immensely cheered by this normality*): Do you mean that? (*Trying manfully to be normal also, even to laugh a little.*) You beast!

HONEY (*fatherly, impersonal*): You see, love's a queer thing Ninety-nine days out of a hundred my views about women and what is the most sensible relation to have with them are quite sane; extreme, possibly, but sane and cool and rational. Then on the hundredth day—probably for physical reasons—my views desert me. I lose all perspective. I cease to be cool or sane or rational. I become a half-wit, a monomaniac, an imbecile. I live in that world of tyrannical, second-hand emotions and artificial sentiments and abortive perspective that is peopled eternally with poets, introverts and scullery-maids. If only the *tradition* of love could be slain, love would follow it to the grave. But where is the St. George to kill it? I must stop writing poetry, it's bad for me. (*He pats her hand, pleased with his homily.*)

CRAWFORD: That sounds like a passage from Bernard Shaw.

HONEY: Thank you. Anyway, I mean it.

CRAWFORD: And now, have you got back your perspective?

HONEY (*doubtfully*): Nearly. But you, you ought to be thinking seriously about your own.

CRAWFORD (*sobered*): I suppose so.

HONEY: Tell me. Why in the world did you pick on Hodges?

CRAWFORD: I don't know. Perhaps for the reasons you gave. The romantic tradition is very strong. The maiden in distress has to fall in love with her rescuer. That's what dragons are for. It's dragons that make the world go round.

HONEY: That's not the benevolent light Addleshaw sees himself in. But, anyway, I should have thought Hodges the last man in the world.

CRAWFORD: So would my grandmother. Even the romantic convention varies. At the moment it decrees that we should succumb to men who don't *try* to conquer us; to clever men and, more particularly, to ugly men. You're too good-looking, my dear, to be anything but a man's man in 1925. So much the better for you. The romantic convention won't allow our generation of women to love your type, and it's too strong for us to disobey.

HONEY: I had always thought that the only kind of men a woman loves are the men who love her.

CRAWFORD: I think that's quite true.

HONEY: But Hodges hates you like poison.

[*She smiles and shakes her head knowingly.*

CRAWFORD: He tries to, poor fellow! But it won't last long. They say hatred is akin to love. That's why I wouldn't have him civil for the world. With a man like Hodges, civility means indifference. Which I should find much more difficult. No, it's all right; quite soon now he'll be feeding out of my hand!

[HONEY *gets up, a little shocked.*

Have I disgusted you, old man? Women are coarse-minded, aren't they? A man could never have been so indelicate. (*She shrugs.*) We can't help it.

HONEY (*emphatically*): Exactly. That is precisely my theory. That is precisely why I have always disliked women; why I am,

and shall remain, a confirmed woman-hater! Thank God you've jerked me back to my senses while I am still safe in bachelor's estate. (*Wiping his brow.*) But, Lord, what a narrow shave! If you'll forgive my saying so, I'm extremely grateful that you didn't take advantage of my lapse.

CRAWFORD: And I'm glad you feel like that. (*Dreamily.*) I believe I would have taken advantage of it when I first came here . . . whether I'd loved someone else or not. I suppose I must have changed. Living with men seems to have made me . . . (*She shrugs.*)

HONEY: Soft. Very natural.

[*She smiles.*

CRAWFORD: I must go and change. (*She pauses, a little embarrassed.*) Of course, you won't say anything about . . . Hodges, will you? That's a big thing for me to have told you, you know, even though it was ever so much less than . . . than I owed.

HONEY: Say anything! Am I a woman?

[*She laughs happily and goes out.* CROFTS *comes in at the window.*

CROFTS: Hallo! Seen Crawford?

HONEY: She's just gone out. (*Calling.*) Crawford.

CRAWFORD'S VOICE: Hallo.

CROFTS: Oh, you needn't have done that. It was nothing particular.

HONEY: There's a letter for you.

[*He goes out, quite satisfied with his afternoon. While* CROFTS *is examining his letter,* CRAWFORD *comes back.*

CRAWFORD: Did you call me?

CROFTS: Well, Honey did actually. It was nothing important. I was looking for a game of clock-golf. Brown said you were over at the pigsties.

CRAWFORD: He told me you were. Then he went to find you.

CROFTS: Didn't meet him. I've been having tea.

CRAWFORD: Then that's how he missed you. (*But his face has changed colour.*) What's the matter? (*He sinks into a chair, shaking pitiably.*) Is it bad news? Do tell me.

CROFTS: No, I'm all right. It's nothing. (*He tries to pull himself together, and reads the letter through. When it is finished he remains with it quivering in his fingers, staring fixedly before him on the carpet.*)

CRAWFORD (*anxiously*): Can I do anything? (*He doesn't hear her.*) Crofts!

CROFTS (*collecting his wits*): Eh? No, I'm all right. (*He rises, and wipes his forehead and face with a bandana.*) Damned hot. (*He walks with military stiffness to the windows and "stands-at-ease," looking out at the garden. Only his fingers twitch nervously.*)

CRAWFORD (*taking his arm tenderly*): Please tell me what it is. Perhaps I can help.

CROFTS (*allows himself to be drawn back into the room, blowing his nose unnecessarily*): It's from Brown's wife.

CRAWFORD: But do you know her?

CROFTS: I did . . . thirty years ago . . . for a month!

CRAWFORD (*amazed*): Was she . . .? (*But it is not necessary to ask.*)

CROFTS (*gruffly*): Would you care to see the letter? (*He gives it her.*

CRAWFORD: My dear.

CROFTS: I think I'll just have a breath of fresh air.

[*He saunters out gallantly into the garden. She has not long finished the letter when* BROWN, *flurried and aggressive, appears on the verandah.*

BROWN: Seen Crofts?

CRAWFORD: Yes.

BROWN: Where?

CRAWFORD: In here.

BROWN: I don't see him. Where?

CRAWFORD: No. He's gone.

BROWN: But where?

CRAWFORD: Come and sit down. I want to speak to you.

BROWN: I can't wait. I want Crofts.

CRAWFORD: You must. It's important. It's about Crofts—and the letter. (*He halts on his way out at this.*) I've just read it. (*She waves it.*)

BROWN (*striding towards her in impressive silence*): Do you mean me to understand that the people in this unhallowed house are not content to receive letters from each other's wives, but that they brazenly leave them about for anyone to read who cares to!

CRAWFORD: He didn't leave it about. He gave it me.

BROWN: He gave it you! A letter like that!

CRAWFORD: A letter like what? There's nothing the matter with it.

BROWN (*working himself up*): Nothing the matter with it! Am I to believe he had the face . . .

CRAWFORD: It's a perfectly proper letter. Here, read it yourself.

BROWN: I shall not read it myself!

CRAWFORD (*shrugging*): Very well, then. (*With mixed feelings he watches her replace it in the envelope.*)

BROWN (*snarling*): Nice thing if *I'm* to start reading other people's letters now.

[*She gets up to go.*

Where the devil are my glasses?

CRAWFORD: Have you looked in all your pockets?

BROWN: Of course I've looked in all my pockets. I've never got the damn things when I want them.

CRAWFORD: Never mind. I can read it out to you.

[*He grunts.*

Shall I?

BROWN: You're a free agent, I suppose? I can't stop you, can I?

CRAWFORD: Well, listen then. (*She reads.*) "Dear Mr. Crofts, I shall find it so difficult to write what I want to say, although I have been longing to say it for nearly thirty years . . ."

BROWN (*blazing*): God!

CRAWFORD: It's all right, my dear. Be patient. "And this is the first opportunity of saying it. I have never known till this week whether you were dead or alive, let alone your address, till Albert wrote to me about you . . ."

BROWN (*in agony*): Fool that I was!

CRAWFORD: "When you left Brighton, I could not find out where you had gone. The hotel did not know, and I had not met any of your relations. I know now, I knew directly after, how abominably I had treated you. . . ."

BROWN (*groaning*): And me, and me!

CRAWFORD: "I used to cry myself to sleep with shame. How I longed that you might have had the consolation of seeing those tears! Now, I suppose, it is too late. I am an old woman. You, perhaps, have even forgotten me. I only hope so. But at least I had to write the letter I have promised myself in expiation, though it is thirty years too late. I was only seventeen then, and you were very handsome and a great lover, and you easily made me forget my little bank clerk. It was really he whom I was deceiving, as we were secretly engaged before I met you. And then my conscience began to hurt, and I was not strong enough to make a clean breast of it to you, so I just ran away like a coward. I don't want to offer excuses. I know it was all inexcusable, and you must hate me too much for that. But at least I owed you the facts. Well, what else is there to say? Albert is a darling. . . ."

BROWN (*awed*): Does she say that?

CRAWFORD: "He is not handsome, rich, nor clever, but he has a heart of gold. He has always been an angel to me . . ."

BROWN (*remorsefully*): Oh, I haven't, I haven't!

CRAWFORD: ". . . and I don't think there is anyone in the world with whom I could have lived more happily. I don't know why. Perhaps because my mother-instinct is strong and he is such a baby. . . ."

BROWN (*with emotion*): Angel!

CRAWFORD: "Well, that's all there is. I have tried not to write sentimentally; I only wanted you to know that I was not deliberate, but rather that you swept me off my unsophisticated feet. It's a small distinction, I'm afraid, and one that I can hardly hope to be very consoling after so long; indeed, I have only written because I can think of no other way of inducing you to think a little more mercifully of Annie Brown than you can have thought all these years of Juanita Seagrove. . . . The Laburnums, Chesterfield Road, Surbiton."

[*She stops. Poor* BROWN *is crying.* CRAWFORD *quietly folds up the letter and passes a consoling hand over his shoulders.*

BROWN (*miserably*): It's very sad, very sad! Poor Annie, my poor girl!

CRAWFORD: Poor Crofts!

BROWN: What a sweet letter! Makes you feel a better man. Fancy Crofts! Who'd have thought it was he! Poor chap.

CRAWFORD: You knew there'd been someone, then?

BROWN: She told me on our honeymoon. I never knew his name. I'd forgotten all about it.

CRAWFORD: Poor Crofts is very cut up.

BROWN (*sobered*): I suppose so. It must have been a great shock to him. It makes you feel old, this.

[CROFTS *comes in, scowling self-consciously and whistling a little. He strolls round the room, nervously filling a pipe. Eventually* BROWN, *who is thoroughly embarrassed, signals violently to* CRAWFORD *to leave them. She goes out. The awkward silence continues. At last* BROWN *clears his throat.*

Glorious weather.

CROFTS: Capital.

[*Another full-stop. Soon they are both humming—different tunes.*

BROWN: Do you know what to-day is?

CROFTS: Saturday, isn't it?

BROWN: Funny thing, I was married to-morrow . . . I mean on a Sunday.

CROFTS: Were you really?

BROWN (*with difficulty*): I . . . er . . . understand you know my wife?

CROFTS: Crawford told you, did she? I did know her once.

BROWN: Extraordinary coincidence. (*Another silence.*) Charming woman.

CROFTS (*gruffly*): She was a charming girl.

BROWN: Hasn't changed, you know . . . surprising thing . . . not a bit.

CROFTS: Is that so? I've often wondered. . . .

BROWN: Yes. You must . . . er . . . come and see her some time. She's made a charming home for us.

CROFTS: Well, I don't know that she'd much want to see me, you know. Perhaps you know there was . . . er . . . some sort of a business between us?

BROWN: Yes, so I understand. She always says she behaved very badly.

CROFTS: Oh, I don't know. Very young, you know, she was and all that. I was a bit impetuous, I suppose, too. Anyway, that's all over now. I'm glad she's . . . er . . . had such a happy life. She has some children, eh?

BROWN (*ecstatically*): Seven most remarkable girls. Indeed, this is a very proud day of my life. I have just learned that our youngest-born, Olivia, is . . . er . . . to be wed, shortly.

CROFTS: I congratulate you. You've just heard, have you?

BROWN: Thank you. Yes. Such a pretty girl! Just what her mother was at that age—seventeen—when she married me. Of course, mind you, in my opinion women used to dress more becomingly then.

CROFTS: I remember a dress of tartan silk that Juanita used to wear.

BROWN (*enthusiastically*): Do you remember that dress? God, so do I. With a black shiny belt.

CROFTS: Do you remember that little straw hat perched upon her black curls?

[BROWN, *wet-eyed, nods.*

BROWN: And that green lace parasol.

CROFTS (*with a sigh*): I gave her that.

[*He paces the room.* BROWN *wipes his eye. At last . . .*

BROWN (*controlling his feelings*): Would you care to . . . er . . . teach me clock-golf?

CROFTS: Yes, I don't mind.

[*As they go out,* BROWN *slips his hand through* CROFTS' *arm. Unseeing, they pass* BINGHAM *and* HONEY, *who stare after them in amazement.*

HONEY: Old prophet, prophesy unto me, what be this strange thing?

BINGHAM: Lo, the lion lieth down with the lamb.

HONEY: Now, Lord, let thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Judge, it mislikes me. There is something uncanny in the air: the peace before the storm, the calm before the eruption.

BINGHAM: Where's the paper?

HONEY: The paper! The paper! Who can read the paper now that spring is here?

BINGHAM: In the spring an old man's fancy lightly turns to houghts of scandals. Where is it?

[HODGES, *very dour and scowling, comes in.*

HONEY: Hail to thee, blithe spirit!

HODGES: You feeling cheerful?

HONEY: Very.

HODGES (*sinking into a chair*): Pity.

HONEY: Well, what's your tragedy?

HODGES: I've had about enough.

HONEY: What of?

HODGES: Crawford.

[HONEY'S *eyebrows rise.* BINGHAM *chuckles.*

Judge, don't chuckle.

[*He does so again.*

Anyone can appear omniscient by chuckling.

BINGHAM: Not anyone. You must know the right moment.

HONEY: In my considered opinion you maltreat that girl, Hodges.

HODGES: I should like to.

HONEY: And you most certainly wrong her.

BINGHAM: He would like to.

HODGES: She ought to go. We've had enough of her.

BINGHAM (*decidedly*): Not one of us.

HODGES: Perhaps I'm the only one; but *I* have had enough of her ; in fact, too much.

BINGHAM: Ah, but that's another thing.

HONEY: Well, what do you propose to do about it?

BINGHAM (*ironically*): He'll grin and bear it.

HODGES (*firmly*): No, I shall not. Three weeks ago I allowed myself to be persuaded and she stayed on—on probation—temporarily.

HONEY: Nonsense: we said until she found a job to her liking. And she found it—looking after your pigs and my manuscripts.

HODGES (*sneering*): In her spare time. The job to her liking was looking after us—you!

HONEY: You seem to have learned even less from your guinea-pig than a vivisector does from his. You've had her under inspection for six or seven weeks, and you don't know the first thing about her tastes and habits.

HODGES: I haven't your leisure to study women. . . .

HONEY: Which, of course, qualifies you to write an essay on them.

HODGES: I study them as a class, as a sex, not as individuals; and for the simple reason that when I say I dislike them, I mean it. With *me* it's not a pose. Perhaps you can't understand that.

HONEY: Oh, yes I can. There have been times when I thought it was not a pose with *me*. Now I know better. May you achieve the same enlightenment. The Judge has achieved it. . . .

BINGHAM: Eh, what's that?

HONEY: Crofts has achieved it; Brown, at heart, always had. Thou only art the lost lamb.

BINGHAM (*chuckling*): In wolf's clothing.

HODGES: I've seen enough of Crawford to save me from that kind of enlightenment.

[BROWN, *with a putter, and* CROFTS *come in. Their voices are heard before they are seen.*

BROWN: Oh, most fascinating! I assure you when my ball went into the hole that time with only one knock I felt positively—positively exhilarated!

CROFTS: A very fine putt it was, too. You should take the game up.

BROWN: Oh, I shall, when I get back. All my girls play. Olivia's handicap is only 24. What do you think of this for a swing?

[*He swings the club, quite obviously for the first time in his life. There is a tinkle of glass as an electric light bulb pays the penalty. Everyone laughs.* HONEY *applauds; even* HODGES *smiles sourly.*

HONEY: Perfect aim! Olivia herself couldn't have been more accurate.

BROWN (*penitent*): Hodges, I really do apologise.

HODGES: Not a bit. Swing again!

[*He rings the bell.* BROWN *hands the club back to* CROFTS, *and shakes his head.*

BROWN: I'm too old to take up golf.

HONEY (*declaiming*): To swing, perchance to miss! Aye, there's the rub. Thus caddies do make cowards of us all.

BINGHAM: You should practise putting into a tooth-glass.

BROWN: Oh, tooth-glass! That reminds me. I have something to say.

[TRENT *answers the bell.*

HODGES: There's some broken glass, Trent.

BROWN: Hodges, I've been thinking it over the last few days, and this afternoon I spoke to Annie on the telephone. . . . Something has happened at home that makes it more than desirable that I should be there; something that makes this a red-letter day in my life: something so important as to call me from the pleasures of a holiday even as enchanting as this. I will not keep you in suspense. Olivia is to be . . . betrothed!

HONEY: Your youngest-born? My dear Brown, I congratulate you!

[*He is overwhelmed with handshakes and congratulations.*

BROWN: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

CROFTS: While the cat's away the mice do play, eh?

HONEY: Good old Olivia!

BINGHAM: And who's the lucky man?

BROWN: A young fellow by the name of Joseph Pennycuick—poor, but upright, honest, straight and a worker. Of most respectable people, too. I find myself . . . (*with some emotion*) supremely happy.

HONEY: And you deserve it!

CROFTS: So he does!

HODGES (*still sullen*): So he does!

BINGHAM: So he does!

BROWN: You're too kind, you're . . .

[CRAWFORD *opens the door.*

Come in, Crawford. Good heavens, what have you got on? Oh, charming, charming.

[*Hands in pocket, she swaggers boy-like across the room, looking very seductive.* HONEY *groans and claps his hand to his eyes.* TRENT *drops the glass he has picked up.* HODGES' *face is drawn, his fists clenched. With careful self-control he turns his back.*

CRAWFORD (*feeling her biceps*): *Now* where are those pigs!

HONEY (*in comic pain*): We are all present, Circe.

[TRENT *goes out.*

CRAWFORD: Don't be silly, Honey! Well, don't look so surprised, everyone. Do you like 'em?

HONEY (*sepulchral*): We like 'em—God help us!

CROFTS: Very sensible, I call it.

BINGHAM: Sensible? Brilliant, I call it. A master-stroke.

CRAWFORD (*flushing*): What do you mean, Judge?

BINGHAM: I'm too old to have to mean anything, my dear. It's all right; I like 'em. I'm not too old for that.

CRAWFORD (*mischievously*): Hodges. Am I masculine enough for you yet?

[*He swings round, and she recoils at the sight of him. His face is scarlet and the veins in his forehead swollen. It is a little while before the words will come.*

HODGES (*with concentrated hatred*): You can thank your stars you're not. If a pair of breeches could make you a man, I'd wring your damned neck.

[*Everybody rises.*

A woman of the streets I can tolerate. I can even sympathize with her, but I won't have her methods brought into my house.

[CRAWFORD *is flushed and trembling.*

CROFTS: } { What the devil . . .
HONEY: } { Hodges . . .
BROWN: } { I don't quite understand . . .

HODGES (*overriding them*): Let me alone! (*Passionately.*) This creature came here six months ago, a thief. She lied and cajoled us into protecting her. She lied and cajoled us till we made her a guest instead of a servant. She lied and cajoled us and flaunted her damned sex . . .

[*They try to interrupt.*

yes, wantonly flaunted her sex, and now she can do what she likes with any of you. But that's not enough. She's made up her mind to marry Honey. . . .

CROFTS: } { Hodges . . .
HONEY: } { Don't be a fool. . . .
BROWN: } { Honey! But nobody would . . .

HODGES (*thundering*): Let me finish. Yes, marry Honey. I'm not blind.

HONEY: I tell you . . .

[*But* CRAWFORD *puts a quivering hand over his mouth.*

HODGES: I don't care what you tell me. I'm not blind, and you are. I've watched. It's time you had your eyes opened. She may think you're a fool, but (*to* CRAWFORD) it's better than prison, isn't it?

[HONEY *moves threateningly at* HODGES.

CRAWFORD (*pulling him back, in a low, strained voice*): Don't, Honey! Leave it to me, please! It's all right, it's all right. I can look after myself.

HODGES: My God, you can!

BROWN (*bewildered*): But I don't think I quite understand.

BINGHAM (*explaining*): This is a modern proposal of marriage Just observe.

[*He settles himself comfortably to watch.*

HONEY (*breaking out*): I will speak. I asked her to marry me this afternoon, you fool, and she . . .

CRAWFORD: Stop, Honey. Let me do it.

[*There is a pause while she faces* HODGES.

HODGES: So I'm too late, am I!

CROFTS (*trying to comfort her*): There, there; it's all right, my dear. He's mad.

BINGHAM: Don't comfort *her*, my friend. *She's* all right. Pity Hodges. *He's* defeated. He needs it, poor cuss!

CRAWFORD (*white and trembling, but in a quiet voice*): It's time you had some material for your essay. And I'll give you some. You say I've flaunted my sex. That's right. I have, unconsciously You say I lied. I did, once, about my father. And I've cajoled you, too, all of you. I didn't think I had. I didn't know it at the time. But I know it now. Those are the three weapons of my sex. Oh, men use them too, when they can, just as women use force when they can. But force is not supposed to be as immoral as fraud. That's because men make morality. If you were on the point of going to prison, I suppose you'd run or fight. I hadn't the strength to run any more. I had to whimper and fawn. Well, I'm not

ashamed of it. No one's going to gaol if he can help it, and I did help it. You don't suppose I liked doing what I did, do you? I tried to make amends by being kind and helpful to all of you.

[HODGES *sneers.*

CROFTS: So you have.

CRAWFORD: You may sneer. You think that was part of the plot.

HODGES: I do.

CRAWFORD: It wasn't. I felt grateful. I loved them, and I tried to show it. That's the honest truth. I don't suppose you know it, but I've been . . . been mothering you all ever since I came here. I reconciled Brown to his wife and to Crofts. I couldn't even make myself resent the Judge, who openly considered me an adventuress.

BINGHAM (*complacently*): I did.

CRAWFORD: Perhaps I knew really he was right. I think every true woman—every woman worth her salt—*is* an adventuress.

HODGES (*with a hint of hysteria*): Yes, Circe . . . Circe is Everywoman. . . . Turns men into swine!

BINGHAM: Possibly a change for the better.

CRAWFORD: Quite true, Judge! (*To* HODGES.) You think Woman's inferior to Man because she can't waste time on his morality and art and laws and the rest of his toys. It's quite true, she can't. She'll smash them to pieces when they interfere with her own ends; but her own ends are the human race! There, you can put that in your essay and stop talking about better and worse; it doesn't mean anything. We're different, and you'll have to leave it at that. Well, that's . . . that's all I've got to say. There's the whole truth about myself. I didn't want Honey to like me. . . . Not that way.

HODGES: Rubbish.

CRAWFORD: I tried hard to stop him.

HODGES: Very hard!

CRAWFORD (*losing her control*): Go on, go on! (*Striking her breast.*) Hit me, if you like! You can't hurt me. You've tried your best! You've spat more filth and venom than twenty women. (*Her voice becoming shrill.*) But it doesn't hurt, because I know why you want it to! You're jealous!

[*She has shot her bolt.* HODGES *goes white.*

BINGHAM (*blandly applauding*): Good girl. Well done! Good old guinea-pig!

[*Her strength gives way. She begins to cry.*

BROWN: I don't know if I'm awake or dreaming. I . . . I . . .

HODGES (*his sting drawn, but trying to show a firm front*): Jealous! Jealous because you've roped in Honey! The sooner you marry the poor wretch the better . . . as far as I'm concerned!

HONEY: Who told you she's going to marry me?

HODGES: You did.

HONEY: I said I asked her to.

HODGES: Well?

HONEY: Well, she refused.

[*An astonished silence, broken only by he* JUDGE'S *chuckles.*

BINGHAM: Poor Hodges! They have played their trump card Cheer up. You made a good fight.

[*The other three are petting and comforting* CRAWFORD.

Oh, why didn't you hit her when she gave you the chance?

[HODGES *is turned to stone. At length he moves, wipes his forehead and takes a few uncertain steps. He stops in front of his writing-table.*

BROWN (*indignantly*): So far I've not said a word. But now I shall. Mind you, I am far from comprehending the entire situation, but I wish to say that the conduct of everyone—except this poor child—of everyone, and in particular Hodges, has been indefensible. (*His hand, which lies on* CRAWFORD'S *head like a lecturer's on a globe of the world, begins again to stroke it soothingly.*)

CROFTS (*muttering to* CRAWFORD): There, there! There, there!

[HODGES *is frowning at his manuscript, trembling in his hand.*

BINGHAM: The dramatic thing to do would be to tear it up. (*Which* HODGES *was on the point of doing. But now he throws it down in petulant embarrassment.*)

HODGES: Judge, for Heaven's sake show some sense of . . . of taste!

HONEY: Taste! *You've* been showing some good taste! The poor, unfortunate Crawford . . .

HODGES: Crawford, confound Crawford! She . . . I . . (*He falls silent at a loss to go on.*)

BINGHAM: How he adores that woman!

HODGES (*controlling himself*): I should like to speak to her—alone. Do you mind leaving us?

HONEY (*to* CRAWFORD): Do *you* mind?

[*She shakes her head wearily.*

If you want me, call. I shan't be far away.

BINGHAM: Probably the other side of the keyhole.

BROWN (*defiantly*): Shall we go, Crofts?

CROFTS: Better go. Let 'em fight it out themselves.

BINGHAM: It's so comfortable here, Hodges. Would it do if I promised to go to sleep?

HODGES (*impatiently*): No, it would not do. Please leave us—now.

BINGHAM (*shrugging, but complying*): It's very hard on an old man. Besides, you'll want someone to protect you.

[*They all troop out into the garden.* BROWN, *the last of them, lingers.*

BROWN: If the telephone rings, fetch me at once. (*No response.*) Do you hear?

HODGES: Yes, I hear.

[*But he still can't tear himself away.*

BROWN (*confidentially*): What are you going to say to her?

HODGES (*angrily*): I don't know what I'm going to say! Do go!

BROWN: The Judge seems to think . . .

HODGES: I don't care what the Judge thinks! For God's sake go!

[*Indignantly* BROWN *goes.* CRAWFORD *is still sitting forlornly, elbows on the table, a little sodden handkerchief pressed to her mouth. Scowling,* HODGES *stands a long time in silence. His foot taps. He takes a turn. He picks up his manuscript again; he throws it down. Perhaps two minutes pass. They certainly seem more. Then, as he passes it, the telephone rings. He looks at it over his shoulder, then takes the receiver off and stands it, unanswered, on the table. A few more seconds pass. Finally he wipes his face with a handkerchief and resolutely crosses the room to* CRAWFORD *until he is standing, uncertainly, by her shoulder.*

And not even the author knows what happens next—or, even, eventually.

CURTAIN.

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